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# Pretending Teaching is a Profession: Why Public School Teaching Will Never Be Considered a True Profession

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Melissa Ann Harness entitled "Pretending Teaching is a Profession: Why Public School Teaching Will Never Be Considered a True Profession." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Educational Psychology and Research.

Dr. Barbara Thayer-Bacon, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Dr. Allison Anders, Dr. Dorothy Hendricks

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**Pretending Teaching is a Profession:  
Why Public School Teaching Will Never Be Considered a *True* Profession**

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Science Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Melissa Ann Harness  
August 2012

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to first and foremost thank God for granting me the opportunity to have the health and cognitive abilities to put my thoughts onto paper; and the many other gifts He has continued to bless me with throughout my life. I wish to also thank my wonderful and often times frustrated husband, Adam, and my two children, Bailey and Samuel, for putting up with my lack of sanity during my days at the University thus far. A big thank you to my parents, Carol and Dennis, for helping care for and raise our boys; it takes a village would be the appropriate analogy that could be bestowed upon them at this point in my academic career.

Additionally, I would like to recognize and thank my mentoring professor, Dr. Barbara Thayer-Bacon. She has been a great inspiration and has dramatically deepened my understanding and appreciation for the complexities of our society, and the way in which one person can and should make a difference every day in other's lives. In her, I have found not only a mentor, but a friend.

## **ABSTRACT**

My endeavor in this thesis is to discuss why teaching is not, and has never been considered, part of the *true* professions. Although much rhetoric is aimed at classifying teachers as *true* professionals and the teaching field as a *true* profession, the historical, sociological, and societal means that govern the ideological foundation of a *true* profession are lacking in the field of education, specifically in public schools. By using a historical, sociological, philosophical, and linguistic analysis of the words “*true* profession”, along with “unions”, private teaching organizations, I am able to demonstrate not only why teaching is not a profession, but that teaching will never be a profession, even when the discourse of teachers insist that teachers are “professional”. Teachers and the teaching field will continue to be classified as anything other than true professionals unless the education system as we currently know is replaced with a completely different way of viewing the job that teachers do. Therefore, I attempt to create a new classification for the field of teaching besides that of a “profession.”

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

***In a completely rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less ~ Lee Iacocca***

### **What Is . . . ?**

Growing up in the American public education system, I have idolized many of my teachers<sup>1</sup>. I never saw them as anything less than people who were experts in the fields in which they instructed students; even if I didn't necessarily agree with them or liked how they taught their various subjects, I trusted them with my education, with my future. I believed that they knew the right answers to the questions that they asked, and how to direct me in a path for which I could learn to figure out the world around me, on my own. Sitting in their classes, I don't remember questioning whether they had obtained their degree from a research one university or if they were even 'highly qualified' to teach; I just understood that they knew more than me about life and the things they were teaching, whether it was the stories from our history books, or the study of the anatomy of the human body. I realized even as a very young child that I probably should pay attention to at least some of what they were discussing. Hence, with this background deeply engrained in my idealistic and ripe mind, I began my teaching

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<sup>1</sup> I have purposely used the terminology 'teacher' instead of 'educator' throughout my thesis. According to the Oxford English Dictionary online the definition of an educator is one which educates, trains, or instructs (2011). Versus teacher, the definition of which is one who points out or shows. My central thesis for this paper is to show that those who are in the public education system are in fact not true professionals, and they lack the power and authority to make decisions and choices regarding what is taught and in many cases how it is taught, thus in fact only going as far as using the skills that are obtained in their brief education to point out or show students how to perform certain functions—reading, writing, and math. The terminology, teacher, is more befitting of the persons who occupy the classrooms in the United States than educator would be. It could be determined that for many using the term educator instead of teacher is a way to try to make teaching become part of the true professions.



career where most recent college graduates do in teaching programs—in a state of naivety and befuddlement.

When I first began attending college, I knew exactly what I wanted to do in life; I had always known. I wanted to become like one of my idols, a teacher. In fact, I had always questioned why anyone would not want to become a teacher? I believed it to be such a noble and honorable way to work in life. My initial belief was that I would dawdle<sup>2</sup> in a position in a high school or middle school that would afford me the ability to have summers off, and access to good health insurance benefits, both of which were huge incentives for me when I first began my path into the world of teaching since I was a single mother. How much more could a person ask for? I would realize, as soon as I stepped foot into my own classroom when I was student teaching, that I was in for a huge, rude awakening, and most notably there would be no ‘dawdling’ involved whatsoever.

I now know, after many years of being involved in the field of teaching in various capacities and studying the pedagogical underpinnings of the teaching field, that the idea that I initially portrayed in my mind of teaching could be construed as that of one of the classical

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary to dawdle means to linger or dally (2011). I use this term in this sense to mean that I had already put in the time studying my discipline and how to be a teacher at a University, so teaching my subject matter to students at the secondary level should come relatively easy to me, thus I would have plenty of time for other activities while performing my job functions. Furthermore, my own teachers throughout my time in school had made it seem much easier than it respectfully is. I now understand that most of them had many years of teaching experience behind them, and most had advanced degrees leading to the misleading belief that teaching is an easy job to undertake.

understandings of what is termed as a *true* profession. In such a capacity, I will explain what is meant first and foremost by a *true*<sup>3</sup> profession<sup>4</sup>.

## ***True Professions: Conceptual Analysis***

Classically, a true profession, as most conceive the terminology, is an occupation that is regarded as a position of which a certain amount of authority, autonomy, and formal body of knowledge is afforded to the individuals. Furthermore, these attributes are widely accepted by most of American society, and are very seldom questioned or researched by those outside the given fields. Most notably, when one is questioned and asked to name the true professions of our society, typically, medicine, law, and clergy are mentioned as fields of the true or ‘expert’ professions; those within these fields would be regarded as ‘professionals’(Gorman & Sandefur, 2011, p. 276).

These three fields, medicine, law, and the clergy, have been replete with specialized rules and formal bodies of knowledge that students are required to master before being

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<sup>3</sup> I italicize the term *true* because it is indicative that this is interpretive of a sociological phenomenon, and what constitutes *true* for one, may not be *true* to another. It is generally understood however, that there are some properties of the term profession that are believed to be implicit within our society; this is the understanding that I am using when using the word *true* in italics. Further, I will trade throughout this discussion the word true for ‘traditional’ and sometimes ‘expert,’ since all these terms have the same implied sociological interchangeable meaning in the American society at large when referring to particular types of occupations. From this point forward, for ease of reading, ‘true’ will not be denoted with italics, however, the meaning behind the word should be applied throughout.

<sup>4</sup> I believe it is important to note in this section that my research is largely based on the Western-European model of true professions which is assumed to be a context where profession is defined by expertise, knowledge, autonomy, and ethics. With this understanding in mind, there is emphasis on academic development and certification and a greater demand on work experience at some point during the degree. Although standards and practices can vary slightly from place to place, even within the same context, it is important to note that there is a unifying sociological context to the ideology of profession that is widely understood and accepted by the public at large.

allowed to train within them for as long as they have been categorized as occupations. They have their own technical language and knowledge base, one in which only members of those fields are privileged enough to know and use proficiently and competently. Access over the theory and content within their knowledge base is controlled and maintained by those in charge within the respective fields; and this theory is thus used accordingly in every day practice. Likewise, the fields are for the most part self-governing and regulating; all the power is within the select groups of individuals within each field as understood by the term true profession (Broudy, 1956).

Unlike many other occupations, those involved in what is considered one of the true professions, do not generally have to be customer-service-oriented, their services are immediately used or consumed by the person requesting the service. This means “that the realization of use-value (its consumption) is immediate-that is independent of capitalist relations of production (Larson, 1977, p. 213). Although doctors, lawyers, and the clergy can be empathetic, caring, and likeable, these types of characteristics that make people feel ‘good’ about themselves and the situations in which they are seeing them, they are not necessary traits of a person that is part of one of the true professions. Thus, the focus is on the practice and the knowledge of the profession, not necessarily the people involved. In this capacity, true professions have a type of monopoly in which it is believed that the services they provide cannot be provided at a substandard level or modified to fit the customer-service-orientated or a capitalistic world. For example, the doctors are trusted by their patients to know what will make them better if ailments arise; lawyers are given enough autonomy to decide what is in the

best interest of their particular clients, and the clergy are respected because they are believed to be the direct link between humans and God (Larson, 1977).

Historically, the ideology of the professions has been around since occupations have been classified and given names in our societies. Respectfully, the ideology of the true professions refers to the set of beliefs governing conduct within the given profession as determined by the historical relevance of the profession at the time of inquiry. The following 'traits' are what constitute the sociological ideology that is historically situated in the American psyche concerning what constitutes the true professions. Some of these aspects of a true profession have been stated previously, but may include, "professional association, cognitive base, institutional training, licensing, work autonomy, colleague "control" [and] a code of ethics" (Larson, 1977, p. 208).

Because of the historical and sociological relevance that the true professions hold over American society at large, the lower and middle classes have come to have a tremendous dependence on what these particular occupations can do for their status in society (Mayer & Jencks, 1989, p. 1444). Many individuals within these classes dwell on the ideology that to attain the status of a true professional is to become the epitome of a success in life; it is believed to be the break-out from the trappings of poverty and destitution (Mayer & Jencks, 1989, p. 1444). Although historically people entered the true professions as a way to earn one's self-respect and gratitude from society at large or to gain a desired education, as we can; today the back door to moving up in social class in America's more capitalistic society has come to have a sense of self-righteousness that leads to an expected, almost entitled idea that these positions should have a higher monetary compensation for those involved in these fields. In

many ways it is unfortunate that prestige, respect, and a desired education have fallen sadly to a secondary place in the true professions in today's American society.

Originally education at its foundation, as it was put forward at its inception, touted that the ultimate goal of schooling<sup>5</sup>, or at least the perceived goal of schooling, is to create competent, competitive, democratic members of society that contribute to the advances that are needed to expand and better our<sup>6</sup> society at large. Currently, however, schooling in the U.S. is highly problematic, focusing more on early career placement than truly engaged learning, and leaves many<sup>7</sup> behind, keeping them from being fully productive members of a society that promises them the 'American Dream'<sup>8</sup>. It is with shock and horror that many students, across the U.S. find out that they have not been prepared through the public schools they attended for a life that would include being able to be a part of one of the true professions. It is a well-

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<sup>5</sup> Schooling in this sense refers to the knowledge that is gained in a formal setting, a classroom, by a teacher. It is also referring to the public education system in which one can find these classrooms and teachers that has been largely set up by the government of the United States.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term 'our' here as a means to reference the entire American society, a society that includes all people living in the U.S. The term 'our' in this sense can be highly problematic since the foundations of the public education system in the U.S. excluded many individuals, including, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, other races and ethnicities, and women. However, I purposely used the term 'our' in this sense because it is supposed to be the reality for every individual within U.S. territories today, whether or not this is the case is something to be further addressed.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'many' refers to those in American society that are still seen as the 'other,' and not necessarily the normative of who America is teaching (White middle class children). This term is referring to minority students, illegal and 'legal' immigrants, special needs children, and those that are considered in low socio-economic status.

<sup>8</sup> "American Dream" was first coined by James Truslow Adams, in 1931, in his book *The Epic of America*. He explicitly states that the 'American Dream' is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement...It is not a dream of high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman should be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (Brock, p. 2). Since the early to mid-1950's, the 'American Dream' has come to represent a more capitalistic idea, one that even Adams himself warns against in his book. The common usage of the term with American society today refers to the idea of a picturesque family with a man and woman, 2.5 children, a home of their own with a 'white picket fence,' a dog, and other nice 'things' that make a family middle class. Although this kind of imagery has been challenged since its inception, the popular 'myth' behind this kind of 'American Dream' still is very much alive in the American society's psyche.

known, but nonetheless a hushed problem in America, that there is an undemocratic foundation to public schooling, and is often criticized that the compulsory system which we have in place across the U.S. does not foster placement of students in true professions as its ultimate outcome. Thus, if schools are not fostering some of the ideals (autonomy, critical thinking, and a love of learning) that go along with the true professions at large, then what is the purpose of having a teacher who has gone through immense amounts of training? If the expectation is not for all students to at least be able to *try* to become part of the true professions if they so desire, than is it not a far leap to suppose that the teachers themselves are not seen as true professionals either? Why would teachers need to be if we have a system that is not set up for them in the first place to become true professionals?

Over time the terminology of ‘profession’ and ‘being a professional’ within set occupations has mutated, and many today consider any field that has a set of specific tools, knowledge, or guidelines to be a ‘profession’ and those within that field to be ‘professionals’ respectively (Hafferty & Castellani, 2010, p. 288). This kind of thinking can be extended to any number of fields or all fields for that matter, whether they be fast food ‘professionals,’ like those who manage a restaurant like McDonald’s® or Taco Bell;® or for that matter trades groups such as plumbers, carpenters, and electricians. According to Hafferty and Castellani, many people in our society call people who have the expertise, knowledge and experience in a particular occupation a ‘professional’ of that particular field regardless of the amount of formal education and number of degrees they have (2010). They also may be referred to as acting ‘professionally,’ seemingly meaning that they are bound by some type of personal ethics, not necessarily an occupational one. We hear this term acting ‘professionally’ in the media all the

time when they refer to teachers who have displayed appropriate behavior according to how teachers are perceived in the public image.

Richard Pratte and John Rury write in “Teachers, Professionalism, and Craft” that “teaching constitutes a type of profession fundamentally different from those that receive the greatest public recognition: that in fact, teachers belong to a distinctive class” (Pratte & Rury, 1991, p. 60). Although I agree with Pratte and Rury (1991) that teachers do belong to a class different from that of a true profession; they argue that teaching should be considered a craft, not unlike many others who feel it is not part of a true profession. I am purposely not discussing whether teaching is a craft or an art in this analysis because I do not feel that it is either. From the standpoint that teaching is something different, a part of something that has yet to be defined, I argue that the ideology that teachers hold of being part of the dominant cultural attainment of a profession is far from being a reality for them simply from definition alone. In actuality, we could

imagine a different assuage for the term [profession], but because the dominant conception of profession comprises such strong and diverse associations and because there are social and historical reasons why this aura of associations has the appeal that it does, the term profession cannot simply be manipulated to fit the category of teacher as it is contextually understood in our society today. (N. C. Burbules & K. Densmore, 1991, p. 151)

Moreover, in undertaking the understanding of what it means to be part of a true profession, many critics argue that teachers should not even strive to be part of such a category because it

can undermine democracy, racial equality, gender equality, and cultural diversity within the field itself (N. C. Burbules & K. Densmore, 1991, pp. 151-152; Gotz, 1988).

My central claim in this thesis will be that although the lines of what it means to be part of a 'profession' are being more and more blurred in today's society, that the classical, sociological definition of a true profession still holds true in American society. Therefore, we should not take a stance that implies the classical definition of a true profession can apply to teaching in any way. In most respects, although there have been gains for teachers and the teaching field in general, teaching has never truly been regarded or treated as a true profession throughout the history of the teaching field. Even though those in the education field, teachers included, like to call themselves 'professionals,' and claim that they are in the 'teaching profession,' that does not mean that others in society see teachers as such, or for that matter, that they are treated accordingly (i.e. autonomy, prestige, trust-worthiness). Evidence of the lack of true professional status in teaching can be found most notably in how we do not trust teachers to do what they were trained to do for the sake of our children and the sake of the future of U.S. society (Thayer-Bacon & Ellison, 2011).

## **Neoliberalism and its Influences**

I will argue in addition to both the historical and sociological aspects that deny teaching as a true profession, that the ideas that are the repercussions of neoliberalism<sup>9</sup> have further deteriorated the notion that would lead most to believe that teaching has ever been, is now, or

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<sup>9</sup> Neoliberalism is a political-economic movement that endorses economic and political liberty, and is a derivative of classical liberalism. Further discussion of neoliberalism can be found in chapter four.



can ever be part of a true profession. The concepts surrounding neoliberalism are complex and multi-layered. However, like that of Pauline Lipman in *Paradoxes of Teaching in Neo-Liberal Times*, I argue that “[neoliberal] accountability systems in public schools create conditions that undermine teaching as an ethical, socially just practice, and this pushes teachers towards the market with its promise of greater flexibility and autonomy”(Lipman, 2009, p. 67). This push for education toward the market is often inspired by the doctrines linked to neoliberalism and is fueled and informed by the discourse that can be found in the public concerning their ideas of neoliberal traits, which includes, but is not limited to the deregulation of the economy and trade, and the unprecedented importance of the financial sector. In this capacity neoliberalism produces a one-size-fits-all mentality, essentially a business model for the education field and for the teachers that are infused in them; thus, turning students into commodities, and the teachers into salespeople that must produce sellable products (‘good’ students) into the marketplace. This is a way for politicians to show the public that they are getting what they paid for, essentially boiling down to one of the most influential tenants of the business model influenced by neoliberalism, that ‘time equals money.’

Furthermore, neoliberalism’s push toward these more capitalistic goals in teaching (monetary compensation for ‘good’ test scores, merit pay, etc.) has led to the advent of programs like *Teach for America*, a program that ‘sells’ the message that they are the answer to the problems that plague education, and will, without uncertainty reduce the achievement gap for ‘the neediest students in America.’ Save them from what? Is the push of neoliberalism into teaching a truly altruistic endeavor, one that is supposed to help students achieve more by bringing in more money and technology, and ‘better’ teachers, or is the corporatism of

neoliberalism just furthering the distance between teachers and their push for truly professional status? This business model in education that neoliberalism tends to exuberantly create lends one to question: Are there any true professions left? And if so, does teaching, according to historical, societal, and definitional standards, constitute a true profession? With questions regarding what constitutes a profession and what does not, I will discuss the conceptual analysis of the terminology of 'profession' expressly in chapter three as I believe it is pertinent to understanding why teachers can no longer hold out for the hope that their chosen field will ever be viewed in the same light and understanding as one of the more classical professions, such as what has been named in medicine, law, and religion.

### **The Taxonomic Approach: Characteristics of Professions**

There is no doubt that teaching exhibit's some of the most basic characteristics of what our society considers to be a true profession. The approach of defining the characteristics or traits "that distinguish[ed] the professions from other occupations" began in the 1930's as a sociological investigation, and would peak in the 1950's and 60's based on a sociological categorization known as a structural-functional model of professions (Runte, 1995, p. 5). Various models were used to determine the characteristics that define exactly what was considered a true profession in the U.S. over the last century as per popular understanding. However, heated debates ran throughout the 1970's and 80's as critics argued that with the advent of neoliberalism and big business take overs, the ideology behind the true professions and thus the definitional characteristics of a profession per se are now null and void, thus leaving the American society with little distinction between the true professions and all other workers (p. 1). As M.S. Larson wrote in *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis*

The conditions of professional work have changed so that the predominant pattern is no longer that of the free practitioner in a market of services, but that of the salaried specialist in a large organization. In this age of corporate capitalism, the model of profession nevertheless retains its vigor; it is still something to be defended or something to be obtained by occupations in a different historical context, in radically different work settings, and in radically altered forms of practice. The persistence of profession as a category of social practice suggests that the model constituted by the first movements of professionalism has become an ideology—not only an image which consciously inspires collective or individual efforts, but a mystification which unconsciously obscures real social structures and relations. (Larson, 1977, p. 37)

According to Larson, it is presumptuous to assume that the true professions still exist as society at large seems to think of them.

However, not to discount the sociological attempt at dismissing the ideology of their still existing true professions in the United States, my argument is that because people in our society still view certain occupations with higher esteem and those highly valued professions have certain characteristics, it is important that we distinguish what makes a true profession such a noble aspiration.

Nicholas Burbules and Kathleen Densmore (1991) have laid out all the characteristics that are given when identifying how teaching can be viewed as a true profession as the “taxonomic approach” (p. 52). The idea is to view professionalism as an ideology and the characteristics that are coupled with the ideology to truly understand how society views one occupation from another. The characteristics that are included in this ideology are as follows:

“professional autonomy; a clearly defined, highly developed, specialized, and theoretical knowledge base; control of training, certification, and licensing of new entrants; self-governing and self-policing authority, especially with regard to professional ethics; and a commitment to public service” (Abdal-Haqq, 1992, p. 3; Broudy, 1956). For the purpose of this research and argument, I will be referring to the classical definition of a profession, in which Burbules and Densmore’s (1991) taxonomic approach are simmered down to four very specific criteria that characterize the very ideology of the commonly understood meaning of true professions as: “enumeration, social status, autonomous or authoritative power, and service,” according to John Rury and Richard Pratte (Pratte & Rury, 1991, p. 60). By these criteria, teachers’ “winning professional status” would be “expected to mean high financial rewards and enhanced status,” the winning and appreciation of teachers and the knowledge that they possess and pass to their students every day would be rewarded and recognized accordingly (p. 60-61). Thus, obtaining professional status would mean extra expenses for the U.S., including, but not limited to, salary increase, professional development cost, extended training and/or higher education cost, and more money to spend in the classroom for each child so that the classroom experiences could be enhanced by outside manipulatives. Put simply, to be able to obtain any of the benefits that are characteristic of true professions these expenses would need to be shouldered by the local and state taxpayers. Unless urgency is given to the cause of teachers’ obtaining professional status, and the case made as to why it is needed so desperately, it will never happen as it would be entirely too costly for the public to take on.

It is also important to understand that the culture<sup>10</sup> of teaching is one that is far from a professional one. Although many teachers throughout the U.S. have advanced training and highly developed subject matter knowledge, there is not a well-defined methodological, pedagogical, or knowledge base that is unilateral in the teaching field, like one finds in the true professions; one that would lend itself to the understanding that there is a specific 'culture' for all teachers to know and understand. The lack of identifiable culture for teachers within formal schooling "pose[s] a significant challenge to the nation's teachers;" and presents "a set of goals that ultimately may prove" to be impossible for most teachers to attain within their teaching careers in our current public education system. (Pratte & Rury, 1991, p. 60) The lack of a cohesive knowledge and pedagogical base only goes to diminish the teaching culture even further. Thus, with these unwavering, unattainable goals in mind, becoming a true profession for teachers is a far off aspiration.

## **Society and Teaching**

For me, it is hard to see teachers as anything other than true professionals. As I was meandering my way through the public education system as a student, I considered teachers as nothing less than passionate people engaged in a true profession; in my experience they had always acted in a way that resembled professionalism and respectability. I remember fondly

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<sup>10</sup> I am referring to a teacher's culture in the sense that there is a particular environment that only applies to teachers. The culture of teaching in this case is referred to as the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs characteristic of a particular social group, which happens to be the teachers within a given school, district, etc. The language of the teachers, the materials they use, the activities they engage in, are all responsive of the culture in which they are a part of. Much of what teachers do on a daily basis, such as dealing with behavioral issues, supervising children, bus duty, etc. does not fall under the guise of a true professions type of 'culture.'

one student teacher I had for English in tenth grade. She was so idealistic, intelligent, and caring! To me, she was the epitome of what a teacher should be. She thought of herself as a professional. I remember talking with her after school one day about the classes she had taken, and how she would be receiving her master's degree in teaching just by taking a few courses over summer at our local university. However, I now realize that her receiving her master's degree by just taking a few courses over the summer, in their shortened program for teacher candidates, devalues the hard work that many have put into making teaching a more professional field. I now understand that teachers are most markedly not recognized as being part of this dynamic group of what is termed true professions by our society because of so many issues, one example of which happens to be the shortening of program requirements to become a teacher.

For myself, I always viewed teachers in a way similar to how a person would view a doctor. One goes to a doctor to ask for medical advice on matters of importance of one's health. I had the same notion concerning the concept behind the occupation of teaching, they were the experts; skilled, trained, and educated to be the ones that disseminated information, knowledge, and the philosophies of life to the public at large. We give teachers our children and entrust their futures to them, right? However, in my naivety I was convinced that teachers possessed the autonomy and individual capacity for producing information without the consent or evocation of anyone else, not dependent on others' authority or permission in any way, shape, or form. I saw teachers as individual agents of their own destinies, with the understanding that they were quite capable of having the ability to think and act independently without having to be guided as to what is necessary, needed, and proper. As Pratte and Rury

(1991) point out though, the goal of teacher education, “is to produce not an autonomous professional but an employee who is a skilled practitioner; confident, committed, and secure in her or his identity” is anything other than a professional (p. 62). Through various means, I would come to realize that my idealized understanding of the teaching field was just that, an ideal, an undereducated acceptance of an ideology of the teaching field. It needs to be understood that I am not saying it is not the case that most teachers are not capable or willing to be autonomous, responsible agents capable of making decisions regarding student’s educational needs; but that because of the top-down bureaucracy<sup>11</sup> that envelopes our public school system, teachers are not allowed to be such. Unfortunately, there is a highly organized body of disinterested, disenfranchised players, which consists of a mix of individuals comprised of politicians, lobbyists, textbook manufacturers, and test makers, who have taken over the education field. Today teachers have become the unfortunate casualties of this top-down bureaucratic system. Sadly, some of the protections that were originally introduced to help protect teachers against outside forces, such as teacher unions and tenure, are the very entities that are the driving forces behind some of the atrocities against teachers today. Many states have taken most rights away from teacher unions, and for the unions to be able to save themselves they have begun to bargain tenure and other benefits in exchange for more money

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<sup>11</sup> Top-down bureaucracy is where decisions about how things will be done for certain constitutions of people in our society are made by people in positions that are seemingly on ‘top’ of others. These individuals are generally disconnected and ill-informed about the issues for which laws are being created; nonetheless, they are the ones that have been left in charge of important issues. Issues regarding children’s educations and schooling in general, fall mostly to politicians around the world. An instance of top-down bureaucracy in school settings in the U.S. would be when laws are passed by Congress and the President that are then passed down to state law makers, who then pass them to individual school districts, which report what needs to be done to the principals, and at the very end of this chain of top-down bureaucracy are the teachers.

and job security, essentially creating a system where teachers are more worried about test scores than student learning because their yearly salary, as well as their jobs, are greatly determined by what a child makes on the end-of-the-year test.

In my studies concerning the realm of teaching and the teachers themselves, I started to realize early on that teachers have an inescapable desire to hold steadfastly onto the belief that they indeed belong to an elite group that can call themselves a true profession. It is due to this tenacious hope that many teachers have caused great detriment to their own minds and occupation by insisting on becoming a true profession. I contended with these very same issues within myself, as I have considered myself a professional and part of a true profession for as long as I have been studying to be a teacher. Holding steadfastly onto this belief for teaching becoming or slowly evolving into one of the true professions is due in part to teachers' own benevolence, as well as from the persistence of the belief that education can raise a person's place in life to a higher status, one that the true professions afford a person, most markedly monetarily thanks in great part to our reliance on the ideas of neoliberalism. It is in my experience that this is the way that new teachers are taught to see themselves, as agents of their own volition, as autonomous beings with the mental acuity to drive home the learning capacities of the students that they are in charge of. They are given the knowledge, skills, and taught to be adept at disseminating information about facts and life in general, but like Pratte and Rury (1991) contend, they are given the skills to practice their occupation, how to deal with students, all the while passing on a small amount of information. However, I purpose that the combination of many obstacles, including, public perception, political policy, media, and most noteworthy, the hack and slash of program requirements at all levels in our education system,



have led to the furthering detriment of teaching trending toward a semblance of a true profession. How can we expect to create true professionals out of those that the teachers teach, if the teachers themselves are not considered worthy of the esteemed position in our society?

In addition to the arguments regarding the analysis of the terminology of true professions and the characteristics associated with this sociological ideology, it is absolutely relevant to examine the history of the American education system and teachers to try to understand why teachers never will be considered members of a true profession. It is also important to explore some of the very features in our society that were started to help 'professionalize' teaching in more recent times beginning with the Federal government's involvement with new individual state regulations and licensing practices leading to mandatory 'highly qualified' status for all teachers in the United States. *Teach for America* and the incorporation of the 'best and brightest' in the roughest school systems across the nation, and the all-encompassing expansion of the ideas of neoliberalism ideas and its far reaching effects on business involvement within schools are only going to further disenfranchise teaching and pull it even further away from the category of a true profession, of which teachers strive for so adamantly. The status of teachers as 'professionals' seems to be a far reaching aspiration when all of these elements come together to create a perfect storm for the vilification of teaching and teachers in the mass media. How can teachers improve their status in society if they are continually under fire for the lack of student achievement? Is there a better means for making sure society understands the complexities of the teaching field without being considered part

of the true professions, or are we, as teachers lost in a mine field of hopelessness only to throw our hands up and say 'I give up?'

I hope in my thesis to analyze what is our society's intention and meaning of the terminology and categorization of true profession; as well as shed further light on the continuing barrage of educational components, mentioned above, continuing to conspire to push teaching further away from 'professionalization.' It is my ultimate desire and ambition in this endeavor to create a new category for teachers. I think that a distinct category that is only about teachers and the cultures in which they survive is what is needed today. We, as teachers, need to stop pretending that teaching has or ever will be considered a true profession and focus on looking ahead to what is needed for the children who are seated immediately in front of us. It is important for both teachers and society at large to understand that teachers are part of something different; teaching is a specific, special type of work. It is understandably outside the realm of the true professions, but more than an art or craft like many want to classify it, especially with all that is required just to become a teacher in American society today. I further hope to inspire open discussion about the importance of this topic among teachers so that their aspirations and ambitions are not needlessly thrown to the wayside in disappointment and frustration because they are not being treated in a manner befitting of a person that is part of a true profession.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

*The lessons are meaningless unless we learn from them. It is never too late to learn the lessons history wants to teach us ~ Katie Olson*

### **The Foundations for the United States Education System**

It is important to look back and understand where our current education system and the teachers that participate in it have come from to see where we are heading and why teachers cannot and should not ever be classified as part of a true profession.

Education is a subject that has always been an area of debate. In medieval times (500-1400 CE<sup>12</sup>), education was seen as a right and privilege of the upper class only due to the monetary constraints of the other classes and the high fee's imposed by the churches, where most schooling took place. Many nobles and kings saw general education of the masses as a needless, and possibly very dangerous, idea. Many nobles felt that education of the general population would undermine the entire system under which they ruled the common populace. This belief structure was ultimately proven correct as many of the nations of Europe suffered multiple revolutions as education became more available to the lower classes (PBS).

In the English colonies of America, education proved to be the catalyst needed to spark the American Revolution. As people in America became more versed in philosophies, such as Locke and Rousseau, they realized that having one person or a small group of people with absolute control was a fallible system, and that only once everyone had the ability and independence to truly follow their life's dreams would they be truly productive. As a result, when Parliament and King George of England began to impose taxes upon the colonies without

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<sup>12</sup> CE refers to the Common Era, the new term once noted as After Christ.

taking into account the well-being of the American people, the colonists knew that they would have to break ties with Europe (Kohen & Lunsford, 2009, pp. 54-57).

After the Revolutionary War, many of our forefathers agreed that education was extremely dangerous to the aristocracy in Europe. In fact, this philosophy was so engrained into our political beliefs that primary education was made free for everyone in the earliest days of our nation. People like Thomas Jefferson knew that in order for Americans to live free and be able to make the decisions needed to ensure the future prosperity of the United States, all citizens considered free<sup>13</sup> would need a basic primary education (Brulatour, para. 1). The idea behind a basic education would allow the general masses to be able to elect leaders who were virtuous and intelligent enough to promote the rights and privileges of the minority groups over the majority, preventing the majority from stripping away the rights of the minority; the minority being of course the elite, white men. The idea was that public schooling essentially began to ensure the future prosperity and rights of the United States and its people through the means of protection by the elite of our society (Kaestle, 1983, p. 5).

America's forefathers, especially Jefferson, were the ones that set the framework for our current educational system. Jefferson structured education in four levels: elementary school, grammar school, universities, and life-long learning (Brulatour, para. 2). Elementary school was the beginning of free public education in our nation. Jefferson stated that elementary school could be attended by "all free children, male and female" (para.3).

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<sup>13</sup> All citizens considered free did not include blacks or other indentured servants, including slaves and women at this time in history. Thus, the reference by Jefferson and the other fore-fathers refers to mainly white, property owning males.

Elementary school was only a three-year curriculum which included American, as well as, Grecian, Roman, and English history and a basic understanding of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and was found usually in heavily populated areas. Grammar schools, which were the next step in the Jeffersonian Education System, were boarding schools for boys only, and there were even less of these available for attendance (para. 3). Most teachers had at least a grammar school education and were usually entering into the universities, hence all teachers were male (para. 3).

Since free public education was first established, many have argued about the dynamics of our education system and how our teachers should be treated and regarded. Teachers of today believe that they should be thought of as professionals, a term used to label job roles which require extensive study and life-long commitments. But why is this label being pressed with so much effort and meeting such staunch resistance? Some of the answers to this question lie within the very beginning of the history of our education system.

## **The Role of Gender in Education**

When public education began in America, as stated previously, all teachers were male due to the structural system of the schools, since females were not permitted to attend grammar schools that prepared individuals for universities (Kaestle, 1983, p. 125). There were various reasons for using only men. Thomas Jefferson, along with others, believed that women, Blacks, and Native Americans were not important or intelligent enough to receive an advanced education. Jefferson believed that a woman should only know enough to teach her daughters and to ensure her sons received a good education if her husband was not able to carry out these duties (Brulatour, para. 4). Jefferson even writes at one time that “A plan of female

education has never been a subject of systematic contemplation with me. It has occupied my attention only so far as the education of my own daughters occasionally required” (Brulatour, para. 4). Many people during this time felt women were simply not smart enough to be able to understand advanced subjects. Another reason why only men were permitted to teach was due to the fact that many felt that boys could not be controlled by young women who would choose to teach (Kaestle, 1983, p. 123).

However, even in colonial times (1700-1800), male teachers were not considered professionals by any stretch of the imagination. While many felt education was extremely important, they also believed that teaching was simply a waiting area. Teaching was a job done during the winter when the farming season was over and the men and children had nothing else to do; it was a way to ensure that everyone was able to at least read their Bibles and sign their names (PBS, 1772 to Late 18th Century section, para. 2). Due to these various reasons, many times when a promising teacher was hired, the position was usually temporary, as the man would leave once a more lucrative position became available, usually in one of the true professional fields such as law or the clergy (para. 2).

These beliefs began to be challenged in the 1820s and 1830s. Jefferson’s original ideas were expanded and many began to feel that the current local system of education was inadequate. One of these people was a man named Horace Mann. Mann felt that the education system should be centralized at the state level and should focus more on Republican and Protestant values (Brulatour, para. 5). Mann was convinced that the way Jefferson had set the framework for our education system was ultimately causing the “moral dissolution” of our children in society (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 1). He preached that schools could literally make

the United States “God’s country,” and that values including things such as, listening to your elders, praying every day, reading the Bible, working hard, and following the law, along with a very rudimentary education that included basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, should be provided to obtain moral rectitude within the masses (p. 16). Mann’s opponents, such as Orestes Brownson, did not fear “social disorder and moral decay,” but held to Jefferson’s original idea that education was meant to provide a way to prevent tyranny by providing a well-rounded education that allowed men to make educated decisions about who could run our country most efficiently (Brulatour, para. 5). Many of Mann’s opponents believed that all Mann wanted to do was brainwash our children and use the education system as a means to control our society (para. 5).

While this was a condemning accusation, Mann’s ideas continued to build momentum. Businesses saw Mann’s ideas as a way to create long-term benefits and future customers. The working class was convinced that this was an opportunity for their children to become wealthy and powerful through the use of education (Brulatour, para. 6). Churches backed Mann because his ideas provided a new secular means of teaching children Protestant religious values (para. 6). Mann believed that teaching children the basic values of our society, while also teaching them basic knowledge, would enable them to become productive members of our society thus creating a ‘good’ working force that kept people occupied, out of trouble, and off the street.

Mann also contended that education should be free to all children, regardless of gender, religion, and social class (PBS, Common School section, para. 1). Mann was eventually joined by others, such as: William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Carter, Henry Barnard,

and Catherine Beecher (Brulatour, para. 7; PBS, 1820s to 1830s: The Common School Era section, para. 2). Mann and his followers felt that in order for education to become more lucrative and to stop the flow of promising teachers from leaving the classroom, another source of potential teachers had to be found. Luckily, there was a vast untapped labor force already available.

When Mann's Common Schools began to open all across the nation, the reformers quickly realized that there weren't enough men to fill them due to the syphoning of men into the professions and university fields, so many of the reformers turned to the idea of using women as teachers instead of men (PBS, Common School section, para. 2). Many people during this time still believed that women were not smart enough to be able to truly teach children. The reformers had to figure out a way to sell women as teachers to the school committees. Different approaches were tried, but the approach that appeared to be the most successful was the claim that women were not only more nurturing and better able to educate children than men, but would do it for one-third of the pay. Mann had to admit that the claim made women appear to be much more lucrative as teachers than men, even if did not approve of the idea that women were worth two-thirds less than then their male counterparts. (Brulatour, para. 7).

Women were not strangers to the field of education. Women throughout history have taught their own children and those around them at home in various ways how to read and write (Kaestle, 1983, p. 3). They would use the limited resources available to them, such as, their Bibles and if available, other primers and novels. Furthermore, they owned and operated schools that were called 'Dame Schools' out of their homes to teach children whom were too young to attend public schools. Reformers all around the nation began pushing women as the



best suited to be teachers in the country for two reasons. First, because they were women it was believed that they had higher inborn moral standards and nurturing capacities than men and hence more capable than men to care for children (PBS, 1840s: Feminization Begins section, para. 3). An example of this can be found in 1840 when the Connecticut Board of Education claimed that “Heaven has plainly appointed females as the natural instructors of young children, and endowed them with those qualities of mind and disposition, which pre-eminently fit them for such a task” (Kaestle, 1983, p. 123). Second, they could be paid much less than a man. In Massachusetts for example, the average salary for a man was \$23.10 per month which included room and board, while women only averaged \$6.49 which did not include room and board (Melder, 1972, p. 22) In 1849, in Littleton, Massachusetts, the debate was in full force. Littleton School Committee argued that hiring female teachers was the best policy and is quoted as stating:

God seems to have made women peculiarly suited to guide and develop the infant mind, and it seems ... very poor policy to pay a man 20 or 22 dollars a month, for teaching children the ABCs, when a female could do the work more successfully at one third of the price. (PBS, 1840s: Feminization Begins section, para. 1)

Most school districts would find that they could do twice as much while employing female teachers, and many would brag that as “teaching is made more respectable, more females engage in it, and the wages are [then] reduced” (Melder, 1972, p. 22). These arguments were very effective. By 1848, a year before the above quote, women already accounted for 68 percent of all common school teachers just in the state of Massachusetts (Brulatour, para. 7). At first, there was no mention that women were intelligent enough or had the mental acuity to

be educating everyone in America, in fact, many of the reformers believed that women were actually ignorant enough to do the same work that the men were doing for less pay.

One of the main complaints about the female teachers was the worry that females would not be able to control the older boys in their classes (Kaestle, 1983, p. 123). The first female teachers were very young, usually between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and most of these teachers only had between a seven and eighth grade education (PBS, 1840s: Feminization Begins section, para. 4). One of the most often heard complaint from female teachers is that the older farm boys or the “big boys” as they were known, would occasionally come into the classroom, were especially disruptive, even going as far as flirting with and teasing the young teachers (para. 4).

However, even though female teachers were looked upon as inferior in society at large, officials began to notice that women were becoming much better educated than in the past (PBS, 1840s: Feminization Begins section, para. 5). In response to this observation, states began to place requirements upon teachers to meet certain standards, such as competence exams and ongoing summer training (para. 5). Many states even began operating special schools solely dedicated to teacher education known as Normal Schools, the first of which opened in 1839 in Massachusetts (PBS, Normal Schools section, para. 1). Thus, people who became teachers during this time were not considered professionals due to the fact that teachers underwent job training just like any other blue collar worker that required job training to perform their everyday tasks.

Even as teachers began to have “formal” education through the Normal Schools and then universities, teachers were still not considered professionals. Women generally only

taught the lower grades, while men still occupied the more advanced positions. Furthermore, teachers were told what to do and what to teach from the very beginning. Even though most class sizes were around 60 students per teacher, thus creating the illusion that the female teacher was trusted in her capabilities to teach students, nonetheless, the curriculum and texts were very simple (PBS, 1850s to 1880s: Women's Experience in the Classroom, para. 1). Usually studying primers or the Bible constituted the reading curriculum. The other subjects taught included basic arithmetic and writing, along with very little history and geography (para. 1).

Even with what would be considered a seemingly simple curriculum by today's standards, many women still had to do a lot of work for a low amount of pay. Many women entering the education field felt that being a teacher was simply another type of domestic work, one that they were suited for, just like the other more laborious fields some of their counterparts went into, such as, spinning yarn or domestic service. Nonetheless, more surprising than the number of work versus pay a female teacher had to assume, is the amount of women who applied to become teachers. Women were not only flocking to the teaching field in massive numbers, but were actually satisfied by the meager salary and feeling of accomplishment that came with the position (Kaestle, 1983, p. 127). While for many women teaching was only a temporary means of living until they could find a husband, there were many others that enjoyed the independence and purpose that teaching brought to their lives (PBS, 1850s to 1880s: Women's Experience in the Classroom, para. 2). Teaching allowed them the freedom to choose how they lived their lives instead of depending on a man to simply provide accommodations and sustenance.

Having women participate in education could also change the education field in ways that no one had anticipated. Since teaching was basically just a transitional period between childhood and marriage for many women, many female teachers did not have a vested interest in how the schools were run in the long term (PBS, 1850s to 1880s: Women's Experience in the Classroom, para. 3). This freed female teachers from the restrictions that their male counterparts faced on the job. It was believed that males were more concerned with career advancement than the woman were. In many ways, new ideas and new ways of doing certain things in the classrooms with limited resource availability were adopted widely among female teachers (para. 3).

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost 75 percent of America's teachers were women (Kaestle, 1983, p. 125). Even after almost 50 years in the education field, women were still not trusted by most people to truly control and educate our children. The belief that boys could not be controlled by female teachers appeared to be justified when one looked into the amount of boys that were being disciplined compared to girls. Boys were quickly falling behind girls when placed into female controlled classrooms (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 24). Boys usually created more discipline problems, and would drop out in much greater numbers than girls (p. 24). In order to stop this phenomenon, school officials began to target boys particularly by providing material that would appeal to boys, and by also creating male-oriented competition sports (p. 24).

Of course, the practice of sexual discrimination within the school system did not stop at the student level. While the amount of female teachers rose, the school administrators were still almost exclusively male (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 25). These men began to run schools as if

they were private businesses with a hierarchy and a clear chain of command, and teachers were at the bottom (PBS, 1890s to 1910s: Women Teacher's Rebellion section, para. 3 and 5). Teachers were considered to be almost as important as an assembly worker in a factory. In fact, schools felt more like factories than places of learning (para. 3). Jane Addams, who was a vital part in the progressive movement of the twentieth century, believed that schools needed to be humanized. She “expressed her impatience ‘with the schools which lay all stress on reading and writing,’” and wanted schools to add “human significance” to their curriculums ("Jane Addams, Founder of Hull-House, is Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize," 2002 p. 9).

As early as the 1850's we start to hear a collective national voice, mostly male dominated at first, ring out; “ Let teaching be made a profession, and let teachers be united for their mutual improvement” (Kaestle, 1983, p. 128). Teachers eventually became irate enough at the entire education system that they finally rebelled against it. The National Education Association (NEA) was created in 1857 and began to try to unite teachers around the country ("NEA History," 2001-2012, para. 1-2). Then in 1897, the Chicago Teachers Federation, which would eventually become the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), was created (PBS, Unions section, para. 2). The unions were not a popular move with female teachers of the time, which saw unions as a product of blue-collar industry, something of which is still hotly debated even today. Many female teachers saw themselves as white-collar workers, true professionals, even if their wages and working conditions were anything but (PBS, 1890s to 1910s: Women Teacher's Rebellion section, para. 6). A woman named Margaret Haley, along with Catherine Goggin, knew that the only way women would be taken seriously as teachers was if they could rally enough teachers around their cause (para. 6). Haley was eventually able to convince other

teachers that joining a union was the only action that would cause the administrators to take their demands seriously.

By the early twentieth century female teachers were not in the fight for better pay and better overall working conditions alone. Men also joined their cause, further empowering the movement for better working conditions and pay for all teachers, male and female alike. With the overwhelming power of the unions pushing and fighting for the demands of the teachers, the rebellion was largely successful. However, even though teachers did receive better working conditions, slightly higher pay and tenure, the administrators, whom were still largely dominated by men and not part of the teacher unions, were still very concerned about the amount of influence that women were gaining in the educational field (PBS, 1910s to 1930s: Progressivism, para. 2). This concern was felt as many districts tightened their control over schools, classrooms, and the teachers within them (PBS, 1910s to 1930s: Progressivism, para. 2).

## **A Rollercoaster of Change**

One man who wanted to see this arrangement changed was John Dewey. He is one of the most influential, but most widely debated educational reformers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dewey, who joined in on the side of the teachers, said “How can the child learn to be a free and responsible citizen when the teacher is bound?” (PBS, 1910s to 1930s: Progressivism, para. 1). Dewey believed that in order for teachers to be effective instructors, they must be free to make their own decisions about the curriculum and to be able to use different teaching techniques with different children (PBS, 1910s to 1930s: Progressivism, para. 3). Many did not like Dewey’s plan because it involved completely turning the public education system upside down. Dewey

understood that a great deal of what school and education were about was social, and thus he believed that children learned most from the everyday activities, whether they be through chores, play, or each other. During Dewey's time children were taught to sit in their seats quietly and obey the teacher at all times. He eventually opened a famous Laboratory School at the University of Chicago in 1896 where children were taught through teacher-student learning together with a curriculum that emphasized "problem-solving, language, and math concepts" where they were able to "move freely in and out of the classroom and explore their surroundings" (Anonymous, 2000). The effects on teachers within schools that have initiated some of Dewey's techniques have been perceived as positive.

After the initial upheaval of the 1910s and 1920s, the 1930s through the 1960s was relatively peaceful in terms of education for the white population in our society (PBS, 1930s to 1960s: Relative Calm section). The Black and Native American populations began to recognize the definite issues that were arising because of the system that had been set up to accommodate the needs and desires of the white society only. During this time a push for equality, including desegregation within the education system can be seen in such landmark cases as *Brown vs. The Board of Education* in 1954 (National Park Service, 2012). However, the main accepted system for schooling had been firmly set up and accepted by "most" in our society, and was well on its way to creating what everyone believed to be the golden era of education for the U.S. The "problems" that arose would simply be "smoothed out by [the] experts" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 17). Therefore, there was little attention given to education or reform during and after World War II even though the practice of firing married women and only hiring men for administrators continued to take place (p. 25). However, there was little

organized effort to stop these practices. These types of gender discriminations practiced in the educational realm during this period were considered “natural, and not as a form of institutional sexism, as reformers” in the 1970’s would go on to claim, but a simple reality to life as a biological female (p. 24). It would seem teachers appeared to be content with the victories they had won in by the 1920s including slightly higher wages, the ability to organize and unionize, and the ability to claim independence from having to depend on marriage alone to make a life for one’s self. As a result, while the practice of firing married women was stopped during World War II due to a lack of teachers, the practice of hiring only male administrators was continued for many more years after the war (p. 25).

During the 1960s and 1970s, we saw a rise in activism among teachers and teacher unions. For example, unions such as, the National Education Association (NEA), started exerting pressure and lobbying Washington concerning everything from test scores to segregation policies. Teachers became busy fighting for social issues; many became entrenched in the fight for civil liberties, leaving educational issues on the back burner.

However, during the 1970s we see teachers begin trying to convince the nation that they are indeed professionals, that teachers are career-oriented, and that they deserve to be recognized as autonomous, capable thinking individuals. Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor of education at Temple University in 1978-79, encouraged teachers to pursue professional status by stating:

We need to move now to a professional approach, which holds people accountable for doing what’s good for kids, for teaching and learning. That requires change both on the part of the unions and on the part of school boards, administrators and parents and



community participants in this process as well. (PBS, 1960s to 1980s: Teachers, Social Equality and Professionalism section, para. 1)

Teachers everywhere appeared to be benefitting from the push to professionalize their career, and focused much of their time and energy to that goal. They fought for and largely won the ability for better pay, pension availability, tenure, some standard and accountability measures, and the beginnings of a pedagogical base for education. Hence, teachers were caught fairly off guard when they suddenly found themselves in the middle of a firestorm beginning in the 1980s involving failing test scores and poor student performance.

In 1983, a report entitled *A Nation at Risk* was released to the public (PBS, 1960s to 1980s: Teachers, Social Equality and Professionalism section, para. 3). *A Nation at Risk* was provided by *The National Commission on Excellence in Education*, which was a commission sponsored and funded by the Department of Education under President Ronald Reagan. It is important to note here that the commission consisted of 18 members, which were drawn from various occupational areas including; various government and education officials, as well as, individuals from the private sector ("The Beginnings of a Movement," 2012 para. 3). In this report, it was portrayed as if schools were largely failing our students. Teachers were depicted as underpaid and unqualified babysitters, working in haggardly conditions, and unable to truly teach our children. The unexpected backlash in response to teachers rise in power had finally arrived. In one fell swoop, teachers were no longer just working in a poor learning environment with low pay, they were the reason the schools were failing in the first place. After almost a century of fighting for better working conditions and better pay, administrators finally turned

the tables and basically said the schools were failing because the teachers were too worried about themselves to do their jobs and teach. Thus, the schools and students were failing.

In 1986, another report, “A Nation Prepared”, was published by the Carnegie Corporation of New York as a response to the Federal Governments report *A Nation at Risk* (“The Beginnings of a Movement,” 2012; PBS, 1960s to 1980s: Teachers, Social Equality and Professionalism section, para. 3). This report laid out a plan to standardize the education system and to restructure the teaching force, allowing teachers to use their own approach in meeting student achievement requirements (PBS, 1960s to 1980s: Teachers, Social Equality and Professionalism section, para. 3). As a result of these two reports, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was created in 1987 by the Carnegie Corporation to ensure that only the best teachers were using the best standards to teach our students (para. 3).

All the strides and gains teachers and the reformers had made to try and prove to society that teaching is indeed a true profession was relegated to the back burner after a “Nation at Risk” was published. This one report essentially started a firestorm against teachers that has not burned out over the last thirty plus years. The evidence of this long lasting push against teachers being treated as professionals came at the turn of the twenty-first century when the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB) was signed into law by President George Bush on January 8, 2002. NCLB, as it is known, is an addendum of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that was first introduced in 1965, and reauthorized in 1994 (“No Child Left Behind,” 2004, para. 1). This act initially was originated to help disadvantaged students improve their academic standings within our public education system. The act was designed to “drive broad gains in student achievement and hold states and schools more accountable for student

progress," all the while representing "significant changes to the education landscape" ("No Child Left Behind of 2001," 2002). In a Press release given by Secretary Spellings at the *No Child Left Behind Summit* in 2006 concerning NCLB, he states that NCLB

is an important way to make sure America remains competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We're living in a global world. See, the education system must compete with education systems in China and India. If we fail to give our students the skills necessary to compete in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the jobs will go elsewhere. That's just a fact of life. It's the reality of the world we live in. And therefore, now is the time for the United State of America to give our children the skills so that the jobs will stay here. (Hursh, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2006)

Under NCLB, students are required to take annual standardized tests to ensure that academic progress is being achieved. Along with the academic achievement on the part of the students, the legislation describes what the schools and teachers are required to present. Schools are required to provide progress reports that demonstrate 'proficient' levels of improvement for each child, which means that the students reading and math skills must meet certain criteria (i.e. grade level). Furthermore, every teacher that is currently teaching, or those going through teaching programs are required to have at least two years of college to become a teacher's aide, four years or more to become a head teacher, obtain college degrees from accredited institutions, take state requirement exams and classes, or pass evaluations and demonstrate knowledge that would entitle the governing bodies to deem them "highly qualified" ("No Child Left Behind," 2004, para. 7). All these measures to improve student learning and teacher preparedness seemed to be a great idea and a step forward toward a more professionalized

teaching field, as can be evidenced by the number of senators that voted for it. Out of the 100 senators that voted on NCLB on December 18, 2001, 87 voted in favor, ten voted against it, and three declined to vote ("NCLB," 2001). In the House an overwhelming majority voted for the measure to pass (381-41) (Hursh, 2007, p. 493).

Almost immediately the concerns with NCLB and its effects for students and teachers became apparent. One measure of a true profession lies within the amount of accountability given the professional individual, accountability that is determined by their peers and the organizations within the profession, not by outside influence or politics. NCLB directly affects teachers and the amount of accountability they must endure. The way they are held to standards that many times are out of their control is a huge detriment to the teacher and the schools they serve. One of the claims was that literacy at grade level across the U.S. was supposed to reach 100% by 2012-2013, an impossible goal by any measure, yet teachers are being held accountable for trying to make it a reality and many are sadly failing. In many states, evaluations for teachers are being corresponded to student progress, outcomes, testing, and other determinants. The initial purpose of this law was to add some standardization, accountability, and professionalization to the teaching field by having stringent requirements for those who wanted to become and who already were teachers. Has NCLB done so, or are we taking away the last shreds of any type of gain toward professionalization before this law was enacted?

## History in Conclusion

As teachers moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the backlash during the 1980s and 1990's has tarnished the reputation of many teachers. The call for high standards has been heard throughout the history of the American education system, at times louder than normal, as we see when NCLB was enacted in 2002. Our society continues to see education as the cure for all of our problems, and standards have been steadily increasing every decade because of what has been viewed as the economic decline in competition with the world. The standards set at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are very demanding and rigid. Today's standards focus more on the teacher than ever before. Almost all of the standards have to do with teacher training, accountability, and performance, and a small portion on student achievement. The belief here is that if the teachers are doing their jobs correctly, then the students will learn and meet their achievement goals. This belief, as many teachers can attest to, may not always be the case.

Moreover, many people in our society see teachers and schools as failures just like the *Nation at Risk* describes them; while others have come to the conclusion it's time to start anew with our schooling system. Some say teachers in the U.S. today have lost much of the respect they were earning throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and still others see teachers as nothing more than glorified babysitters. Teachers currently have strict standards and in many places are told exactly what to teach and how to teach it, much like a factory working assembling parts on a machine. Most recently, new *Race to the Top*<sup>14</sup> policy enacted in 2009 by the Department of

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<sup>14</sup> *Race to the Top* is an education program that was introduced in July of 2009 by President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. This is educational reform that schools will be "eligible to compete for \$4.35 billion in Race to the Top competitive grants to support education reform and innovation in classrooms" (U.S.

Education in Washington, has put stringent evaluations on teacher's performance and effectiveness in the classroom; a teacher's continuance in the classroom is based on strict annual evaluations, test scores, and student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Teachers can only hope that their evaluations will not one day be solely based on what a child scores on a standardized test.

Taking the framework of the history of the education system of the United States into mind, it is not difficult to understand why U.S. teachers are not considered true professionals by any stretch of the imagination. From the history of the teaching field we can understand that because teaching was not deemed a life-time career choice from the very beginning, it involved women, caring, nurturing, and it succumbed to the whims of politics and the public, the fight to make it a true profession would probably never come to fruition.

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Department of Education, 2009). Other monies are awarded to various other educational entities that are deemed necessary to help improve student achievement in the classroom. Obama and his council enacted 'Race to the Top' in an effort to help fund the NCLB mandate that was enacted but not properly funded. Opponents of 'Race to the Top' criticize the lack of research for the program. Some of the highly debated aspects of the reform for teachers and students alike include: adoption of common standards and high-quality assessments; improve and require teacher and principal evaluations, this includes student achievement requirements as part of the evaluation process; and greatly improve academically 'failing' schools.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

*Modern cynics and skeptics see no harm in paying those to whom they entrust the minds of their children a smaller wage than is paid to those to whom they entrust the care of their plumbing ~ John F Kennedy*

### **True Professions**

Those who are involved in the teaching field have found the prospects of becoming a profession a long and arduous journey, one fraught at times with a barrage of hopelessness and frustration. It is apparent that

since early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, [teachers] have repeatedly sought to promote the view that elementary and secondary teaching is a highly complex kind of work, requiring specialized knowledge and skill and deserving of the same status and standing as traditional professions, like law and medicine. This movement to professionalize teaching has, however, been marked by both confusion and contention, much of which centers around what it means to be a profession and to professionalize a particular kind of work. (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008, p. 106)

Becoming part of a true profession is an ideal that not only teachers, but most in our society, aspire to. This category is a way to distinguish ‘professionals’ from other workers. It must be contended that this is not always the most desirous attribute of a true profession; however, the group in which they work receive higher status and recognition within our society. If teachers and others involved with education are using the terminology ‘profession’ and ‘professional’ while referring to those that work in the field of education, what do they truly mean by using these terms? For that matter, what is meant by the term true profession? And, who are true professionals?

## Conceptual Analysis: Profession and Professionals

To begin, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a profession as it pertains to occupations other than religious sects as the following:

An occupation in which a professed knowledge of some subject, field, or science is applied; a vocation or career, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification; ("Oxford English Dictionary," 2011)

The Oxford English Dictionary also defines professionals as people who are:

Engaged in a profession, especially one requiring special skill or training; belonging to the professional class ("Oxford English Dictionary," 2011)

By these definitions alone, teachers could be considered professionals and the field of teaching part of a true profession. However, there is something more to understand behind the idea of the true professions.

Behind the terminology hides an ideology that has roots in America's sociological history; the true profession ideology is a social phenomenon. Understanding a social phenomenon, refers to the idea that "people and their behavior[s] as well as to the relations between them, the groups which they form, the activities, including professional activities in which they participate, and the institutions which they set up; and also, although not least," which bodes directly to the terminology referring to professions, is the "language which they use and the observations which they make, both in their daily lives and in enquiry" (Langford, 1978, p. 28). There is a certain aura that words can take on because of social phenomena in our society, of which real physical attributes do not necessarily have anything to do. They are indeed an ideological perspective rather than actual physical attributes, and this is a very



important but contentious idea to remember. Thus, the term profession has come to be understood rather than defined straightforwardly. This understanding of profession as an ideology rather than a definition is a dangerous conduit for the path of teachers to become a part of; it is one that can and has impacted educational reform through the last half of the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first (p. 51).

By examining the term 'profession' through a sociological rather than strictly definitional means, we can understand that teachers see themselves as members of a social group that call themselves part of a true profession in which they are professionals. However, it is not sufficient enough for teachers to call themselves professional's; they must be seen and recognized as such in the society at large. This is why an endless barrage of materials, books, seminars, conferences, and the like concerning teacher professionalization can be found. Teacher unions, administration, and teachers themselves, are trying to convince society that teachers are indeed part of a true profession. Having society recognize teachers as professionals is essential to acquiring all the other characteristics that are attributed to being part of a true profession. According to Glenn Langford in *Teaching as a Profession: An Essay in the Philosophy of Education* (1978),

It is possible for a group of people to satisfy all the requirements to which attention was drawn earlier and, therefore, have every reason to claim to be recognized as a profession, without being recognized as a profession by the rest of the community. And, without that recognition, they will not *be* a profession. (p. 45)

Many teachers seem to believe that by simply altering how people view them and the work they do, that their job will begin to be viewed as one of the true professions. Many people in

our society view teaching as anything but a true profession, not only because of the history of the education field itself, but also due in part to the iron clad grip of the sociological phenomena of the true professions and what they have come to represent in American society.

### ***True Profession: A Historical and Sociological Ideology***

It is important to understand from where the sociological ideology of profession originated. The word profession derives from the Latin word 'profiteor,' which means "to profess." With the understanding of the root being to profess, it is easy to understand that a professional may be one "who claims to possess knowledge of something and has a commitment to a particular code or set of values" (Lester, 2007, p. 1). It is generally known when one discusses occupations that are considered true professions, that they are referring to what would be classified as the 'ancient professions,' meaning law, medicine, and clergy. This is where the sociological phenomenon begins to transpire within people's understanding of who is and who is not part of a true profession; however, most people who refer to the professions are "unknowingly using the ideas of two early sociological theories: trait models and structural-functionalism" (Runte, 1995 p. 5).

In the 1930s, the trait model of professionalism began to be researched as a way to distinguish the traits or characteristics that must be encompassed in certain occupations that wanted to claim a right to being part of a true profession. Trait models became very popular, especially among the general society as a means of identifying physical characteristics to classify an occupation as a true profession or merely a job. However, there is no theoretical basis for this type of system. Many of the characteristics that supposedly comprised these traits in this model, simply could be established traits from medicine and law that were then assumed

to be the 'unique' characteristics that accounted for their professional status (Runte, 1995 p. 8). Some examples of the type of trait characteristics that were assumed to be 'unique' to medicine and law that were then conferred onto other occupations that wanted to also be part of a true profession include traits such as, high moral character, autonomy, advanced education, specialized training, and a theoretical knowledge base.

Another problem with this model is that the characteristics listed as 'professional' ones can be heavily debated and are dependent on other factors surrounding the occupation. There is no set definition for the traits that are involved with the professions, leaving one to wonder: how much *training* is needed to be a true profession; how much *knowledge* means you have enough to be considered an *expert*; and what kind of *certifications* and *degrees* must one have to be considered part of a professional class? Furthermore, the traits listed are extremely historically situated, meaning that ideals concerning certain traits, valiant values for example, in one period of time, may not be reflected in a later period in the same manner, although they will be viewed and understood by society in a particular way as being a factual part of the true professions.

Trait models are the key to the ideology of the true professions. When one refers to being part of the true professions, this sociological idea is what they are referring to—the characteristics that make up what the sociological phenomenon has created which society then calls a profession. The following is understood:

Since trait models have traditionally been the basis upon which professionals have distinguished themselves from other workers, they are naturally reluctant to abandon the model, since that might imply surrendering their superior status as well.

Consequently, most professionals have simply ignored the advances in sociology which have discredited this model. They continue to measure their occupation against the characteristics identified by various trait models in an attempt to support their claim to professional status; or to lobby for particular reforms within their occupation to bring it closer to some supposed professional standard. (Runte, 1995 p. 11)

When teachers and others in education claim that the teaching field is a true profession, they are ascertaining that the characteristics that they view within the occupation match those found within other socially accepted occupations that are classified as true professions; hence, the natural conclusion is that teaching itself is a true profession.

With the model firmly implanted in the minds of individuals in our society, and researchers understanding the impact that the character trait model has on society, another theory model was developed that built on the trait models of the earlier time period, the structural-functional model (Runte, 1995, p. 12). This model functioned to create a link in theory with the traits that were understood to be part of the true professional ideology. As an example of this linking, one could look at the idea of university training and certification processes that are believed to be the backbone of the true professional. The training and certification processes clearly follow logically the trait of “skill based on abstract knowledge” (p. 12). People that are part of a true profession are trained and certified with a specific body of theoretical knowledge that only people in the professions possess; and because they are governed by a specific body of individuals who are also knowledgeable experts in that given profession, it will essentially benefit the public at large, due to the fact that untrained or unscrupulous people will not possess the knowledge necessary to perform the tasks of the

profession in question. One of the biggest problems with the structural-functionalist model is that the theory is “better at describing than explaining” (p. 15). It is clear that the structural-functionalists are better at explaining how something works, rather than why it works, or why it even got that way to begin with. A great example of how the structural-functional model explains how something works, but not necessarily why it works, can be found in the way that crime in society is viewed through this type of system. According to structural functionalists, crime is a necessary part of every society. The majority of people in a given society adhere to a set of moral standards and guidelines because of fear of legal punishment. Through this model it can be claimed that without crime there would be few shared moral values, and thus, a breakdown or complete lack of the legal system all together. So in effect, a healthy crime rate, meaning not too much crime, but not too little, shows a healthy society at work, one that has a congruity of moral practices and standards. This example demonstrates how structural functionalism is very adept at explaining how something like crime in society works, but not exactly why it works the way it does so effectively.

One of the newest models of professionalism began in the 1970’s which some have named the reflective-interpretive model. It is associated with the philosopher Donald Schon (Lester, 2007, p. 4). This model accentuates:

learning through action and reflection, making judgments in uncertain contexts, and working with problematic situations rather than clearly-defined problems. It generally includes an assumption of ongoing learning linked to practice. (Lester, 2007, p. 3; Schon, 1987)

New models of professionalism have been simply laid over the top of the older sociological understandings and characteristics of true professions. The reflective-interpretive model challenges the ideology of the original ideas behind what constitutes a true profession, and the professional-as-expert mentality.

We see all kinds of occupations being referred to as professions in our twenty-first century society. There is an abundance of advertisements in the unemployment sections of any newspaper or online job websites for people who want to become fast food professionals, front desk professionals, cable repair professionals, and the like. The myriad of jobs that are now claiming to be a 'profession' is never ending. It is understood that as occupational groups start having their own set of standards of practice and specialized knowledge that they too may very well be classified as 'professionals,' so that a garage mechanic today may in fact have to know about alternative fuels, such as nuclear waste material, to fix a car appropriately in the future. The question then becomes, is someone that has to know about nuclear waste and how to handle it more than just a simple mechanic, and should they be considered professionals as well? Will the sociological ideology behind the terminology of a profession then change?

Again, we must revert back to the ideology of the sociological phenomenon and the terminology of the understanding of a true profession as it stands today. For this moment in time, many people in our society may use the term 'profession' or 'professional' in a way that is reflective of the new models that are being studied by sociologists of today; however, it is important to note that all the models and theories regarding true professions are over-lapping one another, which explains why the ideology of profession that we held from ancient times,

when doctors, lawyers, and clergy were considered the only true professionals, is still very much a part of the ideology that is believed and practiced today.

Further, teachers and those with concern in education understand that what is meant when they push for ‘professionalizing’ their field refers directly back to the sociological phenomenal definition of true profession, one in which teachers are regarded as true experts in their fields and given the ‘qualities’ or ‘characteristics’ that would set them apart from being just another worker in a skilled position or job, like that of a plumber or fire fighter. With this understanding in mind let me now turn to a discussion of the characteristics that account for the viewpoint that many have regarding teaching being part of the true professions—the taxonomic approach.

### **Taxonomic Approach: Characteristics of the *True* Professions**

Burbules and Densmore (1991) in *The Limits of Making Teaching a Profession*, label the sociological trait model the “taxonomic approach” (p. 18). According to Burbules and Densmore (1991), even though sociologists have agreed that the trait model used during the early to mid-twentieth century is no longer seen as a viable means to measure whether or not an occupation can be viewed as a true profession, they insist that the characteristics and traits that were first established, understood, and accepted by society in the past as the ones that most represent what a true profession entails are still regarded as such by society today. As we have seen in the previous sections, the traditional professions are a sociological phenomenon that were started long ago, and the meanings and associations of what it entails to be part of a profession have compounded over time until we arrive at what is meant to be part of a true profession today.

Every author, researcher, and teacher has a set of characteristics in mind when referring to what constitutes how to define what being a profession entails. For example, Pratte and Rury (1991) list four criteria in their article that constitute the traditional idea of a true profession; they are as follows: “remuneration, social status, autonomous or authoritative power, and service” (p. 60). For Burbules and Densmore (1991), the list of characteristics includes: “professional autonomy; a clearly defined, highly developed specialized, and theoretical knowledge base; control of training, certification, and licensing of few entrants; self-governing and self-policing authority, especially with regard to professional ethics; and a commitment to public service” (p. 44) .

The list of characteristics can go on and on, and boiling every little detail to what is considered acceptable traits of the professions is a tedious task; however, I believe that the idea most people have in mind in our society when referring to the traditional professions can be viewed as a list of ‘features’ that a particular set of people have obtained through advanced schooling, study, and practice (Bayles, 1981). Professions entail people who have an extended amount of schooling that ends in some type of higher degree being awarded, and that leads to base of knowledge that only those in the profession can have. Even if the knowledge can be read and understood by others, it can only be used efficiently and effectively by those in the profession itself. In conjunction with their schooling and knowledge base, they have served an extensive amount of time in the field observing, practicing, and being mentored by others in their particular occupations. Furthermore, the dominant societal view of professionals entails a significant amount of accountability and high standards, of which there are self-governing bodies in place to handle any issues that arise and any new knowledge that is added to the base



already established. The governing bodies are understood to come from within the profession itself, and are not overly influenced by outside sources. Also, within their accountability system and established standards, a person in a true profession would have the autonomy to make their own decisions regarding what is in the best interest of themselves and the clients they are serving, as long as those decisions fall within ethical<sup>15</sup> boundaries.

The characteristics of schooling, extensive knowledge, practice, autonomy, standards, and ethics have in and of themselves rewards. Essentially, the belief is that because people in occupations that are considered part of the true professions have put in the absorbent amount of time, effort, and in today's society, most notably, money through means such as student loans, to accomplish all the above listed traits they are entitled to compensation above and beyond what others would be allotted in life. In American society professional status, to people in general means "high financial [gains], and enhanced status, the exercise of power (individually and collectively), a new appreciation of individual competence, and an ideal of selfless service" (Pratte & Rury, 1991, p. 60). In today's American neoliberal society I must reiterate the financial rewards part of this idea because as unfortunate as it may seem, most believe people there should be high compensation for people of the traditional professions, many people believe this applies even for the clergy. This is due in part to the far reaching effects that neoliberalism has on our society, the idea that 'time equals money.' The financial compensation to those in the true professions seems to be one of the most important features

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<sup>15</sup> Ethics in the sense of the term implied here is a sociological phenomenon that is interpretive and depends upon societal values at the time of discussion. In this sense, ethics as a means for one to understand that people in a traditional profession must have a set of values that is considered to be exemplary of the values that are most highly regarded in society at the time of debate; an example could be, not to do undue harm to another individual.

of the current push for professionalization of many new fields. Today, in American society, money equals the rest of the rewards that would be given: higher status, more respect, more autonomy, etc. The belief is if you make a lot of money, you are important, and everything else, including status and autonomy, are given to you. All these things equal power (Elwell, 2004 para. 14).

These characteristics and criteria listed above pose an enormous problem for teachers if they want to indeed be considered one of the true professions. When teaching is examined through the above mentioned traits and characteristics, one can notice that decisive criteria are missing.

First, although teachers are now required to undergo extensive higher level schooling and obtain at least a bachelor's degree in most states in the U.S., there is clearly a lack of theoretical and philosophical knowledge base that is accessible to the everyday teacher. As we have discussed previously, during the 1980's teachers saw a push for higher standards and more education, however, this education was in the form of content knowledge and not in the form of 'teacher training' classes. This has become a two-fold problem for teachers in the U.S. First, many teachers programs have been boiled down to the point that most of the classes that are required to obtain a teachers degree focus on curriculum instruction, teaching for testing, and classroom management (Hager, 1952). Some of the programs have largely taken out most of the theoretical and philosophical bases are also taking out the most rudimentary elements that students need to become effective teachers, such as those listed above. Leading some educational experts to ask: What is the point of teacher education than if teachers are unable to connect the things they learned in teacher's education to the everyday classroom because

they do not have the foundation on which to base their everyday decisions? We can see evidence of this even as far back as 1952 when Walter Hager, educational scholar from Teacher's College, was claiming that many in the field of education were convinced "that a young teacher will get along well with [et. al] instruction given to him during his early teachers years, provided he has had a good liberal education and has acquired a scholarly mastery of the fields he is teaching" (Hager, 1952, p. 339). Classes specifically designed to address both educational theory and practice seems to be downplayed and almost cast aside even as far back as the 1950's.

The second contention here is the accessibility to a secure knowledge and theoretical base within the practice of education itself. As it stands for the field of education and for classroom teachers in general, there is no compiled base of knowledge for teaching that is easily accessible to them. For instance, in medicine if someone is showing X, Y, and Z symptoms, the doctor can go to his medical journal and look up what the problem might be and go from there as to what testing or procedures need to be done to solve the problems at hand. For the most part, there is an accepted form of protocol in the medical field when it comes to diagnosing medical issues that arise. However, that same type of protocol system is not readily available or accessible to teachers in the everyday classroom (Hegarty, p. 5).

Furthermore, what knowledge base there is for those in the teaching field has, for the most part, not been codified as a formal body of knowledge of the teaching occupation as a whole. The information and knowledge that has been disseminated to the classroom through research and other means for the everyday teacher does not seem to be as useful as information that would be given to a lawyer to use in the courtroom every day or a clergy

member in and out of the church. The field of education does have a quasi-general governing body called NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education)<sup>16</sup>, however, it does not generally maintain, update, or disseminate information like the American Medical Association, Bar Association, or the Catholic Church does. Furthermore, NCATE is not a requirement to receive credentials to teach in the U.S.; this is unlike any of the true professions. Again, it must be reiterated that in traditional professions, these fields all require extended amounts of time in practice, and participants in these fields must attend graduate programs to obtain higher degrees of learning before they can begin to partake in the profession in which they have chosen to devote themselves too. In most states, teachers are not required to have graduate training to partake in their particular fields, and most do not have any control over the “refined and exclusive bodies of knowledge” in education (Pratte & Rury, 1991, p. 62). Again, this is why American society believes that ‘anyone can teach.’

Moreover, when teachers are licensed they are given varying types of licensing based on the skill level one has obtained. For example, when students are just entering the teaching field, they are said to be student teaching, and are given a mentor teacher to guide them in the first semester or two depending on the program requirements of their particular institution or

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<sup>16</sup> NCATE is a “non-profit, non-governmental alliance of 33 national professional education and public organizations representing millions of Americans” (“NCATE: The Standard of Excellence in Teacher Preparation,” para. 1). NCATE claims that teachers that graduate from institutions that are NCATE accredited have better retention rates and are better teachers than those who come from other non-accredited institutions. NCATE also claims that graduates from their accredited education programs have an easier time finding teaching positions (“NCATE: The Standard of Excellence in Teacher Preparation,” para. 15). Some critics have argued that although NCATE is doing some in the way of trying to bring together the theoretical base of the education system, there are many flaws in its system. Alan R. Tom in *NCATE Standards and Program Quality: You Can’t Get There from Here* argues that NCATE’s standards are vague, and questions to what ‘standards’ they are necessarily adhering to in the first place (Tom, 1980). Tom (1980) and many others have openly questioned NCATE’s “validity, relevance, and operational characteristics” as a governing body of the education system (116).

program. Most of the time, the first license a teacher receives is that of an apprentice, meaning that they are not proficient enough to be left on their own. Then after a prescribed amount of time in the field, individuals are given designation as novice, and then expert teachers. This system was originally developed to help new teachers acclimate to being in the classroom and give an amount of support to them. However, the language alone - apprentice - denotes a type of description usually found in blue collar occupations, such as plumbers and electricians. Whereas, in medicine a person undergoing training to become a doctor is said to be an intern or resident, in law depending on what type of law one is entering they can be either called a barrister or solicitor, and in the clergy depending on where one is in their religious training they begin as a postulants. There is a clear and conscious distinction between the wording used in teaching versus that of the fields already established as true professions. The use of this type of language in and of itself does not further the cause for the professionalization of the teaching field.

It can be further argued that those involved in true professions are specialized in their particular fields, unlike many workers in various other occupations. Specialization is a tremendously important part of the professional's livelihood; they are not amateurs or semi-professional workers, but possess the skills to handle and deal with specific problems and everyday situations that are presented to them in their given fields. A heart surgeon would not be made to treat or perform surgery on a patient that needed to have a kidney removed. They choose a field, know the knowledge base of medicine, and then get the expertise and intricacies that must be known for the specific area that they will be administering to.

Teaching in this capacity, if taken in the context of specialization alone, is a far cry from being a true profession. Teachers, although in many states are required to specialize in a discipline, such as math or science, are not necessarily even required to teach the field in which they received their 'expert' status in. In some states once a license is acquired for one subject, e.g. math or science, changing subject fields is as easy as taking and passing a standardized test about the subject matter wanting to be taught, e.g. history. Through studies we can know that "on average, [secondary teachers] spend only about three quarters of their time teaching in fields in which they have a college major or even minor" (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008, p. 112). Further, in some places like the state in which my teaching license was issued, one test covers five different social science disciplines—American history, World history, Economics, Geography, and Political Science. My degree is in History. I took exactly two geography classes, one political science course, and no economics courses; so does this mean that because I have a degree in a social science field that I should be teaching anything other than what I know about, which is American and World History?

The act of specialization is a huge contention for teachers, especially elementary teachers, who are supposed to teach every subject to the children in their classrooms every day. It was evident to me in elementary school which subjects my teachers liked and which ones they did not; it was reflective in the way they were able to explain the knowledge of particular subjects to us. Is it any more fair to ask a math teacher to take over a class for driver's education because they have a license then it is to ask a pediatrician to work on your cat? So does this matter to the state of professionalization for teachers? I would have to say the idea that just because you're a teacher in one field doesn't necessary mean you can teach

something else. These kinds of prevailing program examples don't bode well for the argument for professionalization of the teaching field.

Secondly, there are three very key elements that are missing from the teaching field that work hand-in-hand to create the sociological ideology of a true profession, and they are: autonomy, self-governance, and collegium (Abdal-Haqq, 1992 p. 5). First, autonomy is espoused as one of the greatest attributes of the teaching field to every student entering it. It is supposed to be the saving grace of teachers; something they can call their own and control within the walls of their classroom. However, it is also widely known that in the mad rush to try and secure the sociological ideal of teaching being a true profession, much, if not most, of the autonomy in the classroom has been thrown to the wayside (Myers, 2008, pp. 4-11). New standards and regulations that were initially supposed to be for the betterment of the 'profession' of teaching and student's achievement, and increase the accountability and standards of the teaching field, thus raising teachers status in the eyes of society, have in fact done nothing but further take away any semblance of autonomy they had in their classrooms. This goes hand-in-hand with how the schools are run and by whom, referring, of course, to the lack of self-governing by the teachers, and the disproportionate governance of everyone else, including, but not limited to, politicians, state and federal government, textbook manufacturers, school boards, and private business.

Education is very much a top-down kind of authority system in public schools as designed in the U.S. in which everyone else is over the teacher, telling them what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Again, this top-down authority takes away any semblance of autonomy or authority the teacher may have except within the classroom space, where teachers are

above with their students. There is little doubt that the teaching field is a bureaucratic system. There is no semblance of self-governing or equal rank among any of the players within the public school system. This fact has been so obvious; John Dewey in 1903 wrote the following:

As to the teacher: If there is a single public school system in the United States where there is official and constitutional provision made for submitting questions of methods of discipline in teaching and the questions of curriculum, textbooks, etc., to the discussion of those actually engaged in the work of teaching; the fact has escaped my notice; indeed the opposite situation is so common that it seems, as a rule, to be absolutely taken for granted as the normal and final condition of affairs. (Ambrosie & Haley, 1988, p. 85; Dewey, 1916)

Although over the last hundred years we have seen some improvement in the way teachers are allowed to govern within their own schools and districts, not much has changed outside the reach and influence of their small circle. Characteristically, laws passed by governments, both federal and state, and school boards make the decisions about what is best for students, and the teachers are supposed to accept and maintain these laws and rules in their everyday practices in the classroom.

At this point I must interject back to the point regarding the lack of a codified and accepted knowledge base for teachers. Because teachers are at the mercy of bureaucratic and political whims, including laws and regulations given to them by our government, educational research is largely overlooked, and disregarded and/or manipulated to substantiate what the government's policymakers want to emphasize. A great example of this type of disregard for educational research can be found in the program that was mandated by Congress titled *No*



*Child Left Behind* (NCLB). It suffices at this point to acknowledge that just a couple years after the government's investigation of the program, research was concluded that showed extensively that the programs and goals of NCLB do not work and need to be amended, or a new, more researched one put into its place. Teachers had been rallying for a change in policy for over a year when the research starting appearing, but because NCLB was already in place, and the politicians at the time did not want to rescind it, knowing that it would not look favorably on them, the plan was continued. Many teachers throughout the U.S. feel that the program has done much more harm to student learning than good. Many teachers feel that the focus has been taken away from authentic critical thinking skills and instead our emphasis has shifted to one on testing students' achievement, as well as a focus on competition among teachers themselves (Valli & Chambliss, 2007).

Furthermore, standards and accountability measures were supposed to be increased under the new guidelines of NCLB to help further 'professionalize' the field of teaching and create better academic achievement standards for the students. It is my belief that those who produced some of the research that led to the laws that produced NCLB were under the assumption that teachers were 'professionals' in a sense; however, the politicians that actually wrote the NCLB laws and voted them into law do not see teachers as true professionals. All the new laws did was cause a further rift between any semblance of a knowledge base, for the educational research, the teachers, and the students. In essence, NCLB is causing the teaching field to move further away from ever becoming a true profession, and is in fact, de-skilling the teaching field. Like Dewey suggests in the above quote, unless teachers are given some type of

decision making authority and governance over the education system, programs like NCLB will only promise everything and deliver nothing (Ambrosie & Haley, 1988, p. 84; Dewey, 1916).

Finally, I would like to discuss two last issues pertaining to the response of characteristics under the 'taxonomic approach;' status and compensation, one being hand-in-hand with the other. Teachers, who support professionalizing the teaching field, tend to contend that if the teaching field was indeed deemed by society to be part of the true professions, a higher status would be given to teachers by society. This change in status would cause the ideas about teaching to change, and that in fact would lead to changes, one of the most significant to many in the education field, especially teachers, is pay. Here I need to reiterate that in today's American society, because of neo-liberalism and the like, money equates to higher status which equates to more power, which leads to the hopeful progression toward teaching becoming a true profession.

With traditional professions, compensation is relatively high and benefits offered are rather well throughout the lifetime of careers. I would like to note here that the clergy 'can' be an exception to the idea that traditional professionals make more in monetary compensation than other individuals. The idea is that clergy are well respected and hold a certain status in our society that transcends beyond money. Just like the other true professions they are required to have extensive training, most of which today have four year theological degree's, and they most certainly have a 'guide'<sup>17</sup> that they all must follow. Furthermore, it has been possible for the clergy throughout history to make large amounts of money for both themselves and the

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<sup>17</sup> Bible

churches in which they serve; and in many ways this still can happen even in today's society, with book publications and guest lectures. In this endeavor it is not for me to judge whether or not the obtainment of wealth for the clergy is necessarily a 'good' or 'bad' thing. However, generally speaking, those who serve in the clergy are well taken care of for the services they perform. In many places the clergy, even if not actively practicing in the church, are taken care of, meaning they receive some sort of compensation for housing, utilities, cars, health insurance, retirement plans, and other essential human needs, such as, food and clothing.

Nonetheless, the high monetary compensation, in whatever form that it is obtained, is in part due to the lengthy schooling, and training/practicing that professionals have to obtain to become part of the profession. Teachers, although they go through school and training to some degree, do not have the same kind of in-depth and lengthy processes that true professions, such as law and medicine require, although today's teacher in the U.S. has at least a college degree with many having a master's degree. Teacher salaries have been a contention for many years with those in and out of the teaching field. One of the biggest dilemma's faced by teachers is that their salaries are based on taxes that are paid by taxpayers. Most people in the U.S. resent paying taxes, and if given a choice, raising them to help build and maintain schools, and to pay teachers more is completely out of the question (Bowman, 2008). Comparatively, teachers are paid much less than other fields, even many which are not considered part of the true professions. In 2000-2001, the mean average salary for a teacher holding a Bachelor's degree in the U.S. was \$26,609; whereas, a manager of general business earned \$75,470, and a person in sales earned \$36,521, while the mean annual salary of a surgeon was \$177,690; a lawyer was \$110,520; and the clergy set at a respectable approximation of \$45,000 to \$75,000

dollars per year on average (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008, p. 114). These statistics are from the Department of Education in Washington, D.C., and are representative of beginning salaries for the respective fields. As anyone can plainly tell, teachers' salaries are nearly 50% less than even fields that are not classified, as true professions; and they continue this trend throughout the span of their careers.

Teaching is not as prestigious or high paying as positions that are 'professionalized,' but they still hold a type of luster that other positions in the lower end of the pay scale do not hold, such as secretaries and truck drivers, even though many teachers fall into the same salary category as these jobs. It is true that although teachers make half as much as other fields, there are still some benefits of to the teaching field that are not afforded to these other occupations; such as, the 'actual'<sup>18</sup> working hours for teachers, the vacation time received every year<sup>19</sup>, and the undeniable feeling that you are helping students learn how to think and become productive members of society. These non-monetary benefits that teachers receive, make it understood that there is something to be said about not wanting to be part of the true professions. I move to consider reasons for teachers not to want to be part of a true profession.

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<sup>18</sup> By 'actual' working hours I am referring to the time that a teacher must be in the classroom instructing students. On a four block scale, teachers generally teach three blocks with one block left for classroom planning. On a six or more set block, the teacher receives at least one planning period, if not more, depending on what is required at the school they teach. So the 'actual' time in instruction, in the classroom, is rather minimal when placed against other jobs, like secretaries that must be at their given stations the entire time they are performing their job duties. However, there is still the expectation for teachers of continual faculty/staff development and curriculum development, planning and implementing are not considered in 'actual' working hours, but are nonetheless required for student achievement.

<sup>19</sup> Teacher's vacation is based on the type of system in which they teach. In a more traditional school system, the teacher receives the summer months off, whereas in a year round school, the vacation time is spread out over the year, and depends on when breaks fall as to when the teacher will receive vacation time. Nonetheless, the amount of time off for teachers is approximately the same in both instances, and is much more than other occupations throughout the U.S. are given on a whole.

## **Cost of Using Professional Status as Defined by the Sociological Phenomenon**

It can be said that some research and reforms concerned with trying to 'professionalize' the field of teaching, assume that it will benefit the entire education system to make teachers be perceived as true professionals (Gotz, 1988; Ingersoll & Perda, 2008, p. 116). It is believed that improving the plight of teachers and the status that they have in society, so that society accepts teaching as one of the true professions, would vastly improve student achievement and success because it would redeem a sense of satisfaction and motivation that teachers in today's classrooms are lacking. Furthermore, we must assume that by improving autonomy, status, benefits, and pay for teachers that society will accept them into the sociological ideology that has been indoctrinated into our system; that teachers will, in fact, be willing to do what it takes to maintain a level of professionalism expected by society for someone in a true profession. However, this level of commitment and professionalism is not demonstrated by many teachers today. There is currently little research that can prove or disprove that paying teachers more or giving them more authority over curriculum and the knowledge base of education will have a dramatic impact on how students in their tutelage will perform. Furthermore, there is little actual research, outside of a historical perspective on whether or not society could even begin to accept the changes that would be required to make teaching a true profession. There is, however, research from a sociological prospective that can prove that the push and acceptance of professionalization of a field can have many interesting negative effects to the participants and clients involved (N. C. Burbules & K. Densmore, 1991, p. 151).

One of the most critical claims as to why teaching should not be endeavored to become a true profession lies in the idea that there are consequences to the power and privilege that

are granted to the true professions; the consequences of which can “undermine the ends of democracy, equity, and cultural diversity” in school (N. C. Burbules & K. Densmore, 1991, p. 151).

Like medicine and law, if teaching were a profession it would become an elitist institution, and have a very prescriptive set of guidelines and knowledge with limitations on who would be allowed in. Individuals must be accepted into programs of study to partake in the ‘insider’s’ understanding of a profession. Much of the time, entrance into such programs is extremely competitive, sometimes classist and even racist because of where TFA chooses to recruit its members. TFA boasts on their website that 27% of their members come from Spelman College, 18% from Harvard, 16% from Duke University, and 14% from Morehouse College (Teach For America, Our Mission: Enlisting Committed Individuals, 2011, Side Bar). One of the consequences of using a model under the guise of a profession is that the more restrictive requirements for entrance may cause minorities and the under-privileged in our society not to want to participate in the programs, or for that matter, be allowed to participate in them in the first place. Thus, a substantiated claim is that professionalizing teaching would in fact take minority teachers out of classrooms. Clear evidence of this can be seen in *Teach for America* (TFA). TFA will be discussed in chapter four, but for the purposes here, it is a program that places the “brightest” college graduates in the “roughest” schools across the nation. What this means is white college graduates in professional programs, such as medicine and engineering, from elite schools, such as, Princeton, Harvard, and the like, spend two years teaching in order to try and ‘save’ the run-down inner-city schools (Anderson, 2011 para. 8-9). Programs in our society, such as TFA, do not see teachers as experts of education. These

graduates are putting in their time before they go to study and become part of their 'real' professions, like law and medicine. Sound familiar? This is exactly what happened when public school teaching first began to be developed substantially in the U.S (see chapter three), when men left teaching for their 'real' profession, or women left to become wives and mothers. It is the same principle. Teaching is not and has never been seen as a true profession. My point here is that maybe teachers shouldn't want this goal of becoming a true profession in the first place.

Furthermore, this type of us-versus-them mentality, when one partakes into fields of study that are classified as true professions, seems to be enacted to keep clientele at arm's length. There is a distance, a gap, between who the professional is and what they know and their clients. Teachers, by pushing so adamantly for professionalization, are pushing for distinguishing themselves from other workers, many of whom are parents of the students they teach. Teachers are seeking to be recognized as having specialized knowledge that parents don't necessarily have, even though parents are children's first educators. This could create a rift between the teachers in the classroom, what the students need them to be, and what the parent's desire for their children. If parents feel that they are being held away, or restricted from the knowledge that their children are being taught because it is perceived that teachers are trying to create a sense of 'otherness' or restricted privilege within their 'profession', it could have huge consequential impacts on parent-teacher-student relationships. Parents and teachers not working in partnership together could harm the successful schooling of children.

Finally, professionalization will end up only causing more standardization and testing of both teachers and students alike because it's a way to try to control many factors that affect teaching and learning. Standardization has an implied meaning that there is a formula that if

teachers follow only certain approved, prescribed techniques, that 'good' results will follow suite. Standardization also implies that all success looks the same for every child in America. What does this mean for all parties involved? The answer is more government regulation and rules. Nothing in public education can be done without the government getting into everything that education is involved with, because salaries for teachers and monies for schools all come and are paid by citizens' taxes, and taxes are provided by our government. The government thinks they have the right to ask schools to produce citizens that fulfill the government's needs, and that they have a responsibility to manage their citizens' money properly by demanding accountability. There will never be a time, except if the system of education is completely changed and overhauled, that the government and the bureaucracy that follow will not be involved in the politics of education. I use the word politics here because the field of teaching is convoluted with politics. The politics in education are what harms the public educational system, and takes control out of the hands of local teachers. Hence, with the understanding that government will never have their hands out of the educational system, teachers will never be allowed to be true professionals in U.S. society (Gold, Henig, & Simon, 2011, pp. 35-36).

Although by definition true professions many seem quite obtainable, and teachers classified as 'professionals' within this framework seem plausible, the ideology behind the sociological foundations will not permit teachers to be part of a true profession. Seemingly, the teaching field and the teachers within it appear to exhibit many of the characteristics needed in order to be granted true professional status. However, there are sociological as well as other outlying reasons why teachers will never be allowed to be part of a true profession. These



reasons make it impractical and undesirable for teachers to be part of the trend to try and make teaching a true profession.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

***Teachers cannot paint pictures of hardship. By the way, we always hear about liberals and everything they do is “for the children.” Does this constitute “for the children?” Does this not look like a bunch of bullying to you? I thought we were teaching in schools about bullying and how not to be bullies and what to do if you are bullied—and who now are the bullies?... We have a genuine, petulant, immature, tireless bunch of bottom-feeder freeloaders acting in a temper tantrum... They’re using children as human shields, just like leftists and terrorists always do. Whoa! How else would you describe this? ~ Rush Limbaugh, in regards to teacher protests and protestors in Madison, Wisconsin 2011***

### **Say What? . . . Public Opinion**

A talented, young female student went to college and decided early in her college career that she wanted to be a second grade teacher. After hearing their daughter’s chosen field, her parents began to criticize her, and encouraged her to ‘do better.’ However, she persevered through school and eventually received her degree in elementary education. Her mother complained endlessly to her about her chosen field of study, saying, “We didn’t send you to one of the most prestigious schools in the country so you could teach second grade.” She kept hearing the words of her parents over and over in her head, “You could have been something more, done better for yourself and your future.”

After five years teaching second grade and putting up with an endless barrage of criticisms from her parents and various friends, she left teaching to take a position in the private sector with a company that would go on to pay her a six figure salary a year, as well as great benefits, and where she had a prestigious title afforded her. After obtaining her career within the private company, her parents and friends were elated that she finally had left teaching. Because of her better salary and more prestigious title, it seemed as though many

around her wanted to get to know her better and become friends; even some people who had once scoffed at her when she was teaching.

Sadly, this scenario takes place over and over again in homes all across America, sometimes way before children even begin their college careers. Parents want what is best for their children, and many do not see the teaching field as an opportunity for their children to make the most out of their lives. According to the 2011 Gallup Poll, 33% of Americans polled would not like a child of theirs to take up teaching in a public school as a career choice (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011, p. 11). This number has steadily increased to 33% over the last twenty years, as teachers are becoming less revered in society's mind, and blamed more and more for the inadequacies that the American education system is dealing with, including but not limited to, depressingly sagging graduation rates, lower academic achievement, and most notably within the last ten years for various reasons in and of themselves, falling test scores (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011, p. 11). Even if those in education and the teachers themselves know that these problems are in fact due most of the time to systemic issues and not individual teachers, the way our society has come to understand it, thanks in great part to the media, politicians and various other educational enterprises (*Teach for America* being exemplified here), that it has to be the teacher's fault our children are perceived<sup>20</sup> as failing.

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<sup>20</sup> I use the word perceived in this instance because America's schools, at least by what most hear in the media and the discussion among citizens at large, is are perceived as not performing well when compared to other industrialized nations around the world. This perception can and should be challenged because although our graduation rates are sagging behind some other nations, we must take into account many different facets of our educational system that are not comparable to these other nations at large. By no means am I ascertaining here that certain aspects of our educational system don't need to be debated upon and changed, but it needs to be understood that it is more complicated than comparing score for score or statistic for statistic in this capacity.

The lack of interest in becoming a teacher might be due to how teachers are represented in various media outlets in our society. In the same 2011 Gallop Poll, participants were asked if they hear more good or bad stories about teachers in the media (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011, p. 11). An overwhelmingly 68% of participants reported that they had heard more bad stories than good ones as reported by the news media (2011). These negative stories presented by the media in American society only act to further glorify the ills associated within our education system, and feed the fodder of the political system which continually calls for stricter regulations of both teachers and the systems that they work within, thus only going to clarify that teachers are indeed not part of a true profession.

Combined, the push of ideas of neoliberalism that go to mar the good intentions of teachers, the discussion among both educational experts and the public at large about how *Teach for America* is supposedly going to save the nation's most neediest children, and the attacks on teacher unions, have only made it more difficult to try and prove that teaching should be considered to be part of a true profession. The negative images that are reported and portrayed of teachers and the current education system in our society through these above mentioned means, have led to a multitude of negative impacts, some of which include: loss of autonomy in the classroom, more standardized testing for students, prescribed curriculum control by state boards, politicians, and privatized companies, and accountability that is not based solely on a teacher's own performance, but on the testing scores of their students. The reasons for the spot light on these various entities in our society is only going to further push teaching away from being a true profession.

In the following sections I will demonstrate how society in the U.S. is being told to see and examine teachers, and by no means is it through the lens of them being true professionals. Further, I will examine the tendencies of neoliberalism in the U.S. and the consequences, including the development of *Teach for America*, and how this program and others like it are not only confirming that teaching is not a true profession, but are deskillling the field as a whole. I will also take the push for the reduction in union control in the teaching field and how the media and politicians are playing teachers and their 'sacred' duties against what is really going on.

## **The Impacts of Neoliberalism**

I think it is important at the beginning to clearly define what is meant by the term "neoliberalism" and where its origins began. Neoliberalism is a political-economic movement that endorses economic and political liberty (AskDefine, para. 1). It is a movement that "is sometimes described as an effort to revert to the economic policies of [earlier] classical liberalism (para. 1). Classical liberalism is "a set of ideas that places the freedom of the individual as its central feature" (Ashford, 2011). This ideology, based upon John Locke's "Social Contract" was one that many of the founders of the United States, including Thomas Jefferson and John Madison, believed that the U.S. should follow. According to Dr. Nigel Ashford (2011), professor at George Mason University, classic liberalism has ten core principles that are identified as tenets of classic liberalism, and they are as follows: 1. a belief in liberty; 2. the importance of the individual; 3. a skepticism of power; 4. an understanding of the rule of law in society; 5. the significance of civil society (less government involvement and more take over from private sectors, such as, churches and businesses); 6. the value of order in society; 7.

imperative free market trade; 8. toleration of individual views; 9. peace within a nation and among its people; and 10. very limited government involvement with all aspects of society (Ashford, 2011)<sup>21</sup>.

Neoliberalism, as we have come to know it today, came from a “historic compromise between capital and labor” that occurred after World War II when Franklin Roosevelt’s social programs were put into place (Hursh, 2007, p. 496). The “historic compromise” allowed wages to increase for workers, created a better standard of living for everyone, higher profit margins for corporations, and more equality between individuals (p. 496). However, as the U.S. started having problems in the early 1960’s, with the start of the Vietnam War, the advent of OPEC, and the rising of oil prices, the U.S. began finding it difficult to fund many of the social programs that were originally begun by FDR at the turn of the century (p. 496). Corporations also realized that they could not continue to pass along wage increases and other costs onto the consumer and stay viable. So the U.S. began to adopt and implement many of the policies we now associate with neoliberalism (496). These policies are said to be: “the deregulation of the economy, trade liberalization, the dismantling of the public sector [including education, health, and social welfare], and the predominance of the financial sector of the economy over production and commerce” (Hursh, 2007, p. 495; Tabb, 2002). Essentially, neoliberalism has “transform[ed] how we conceptualize the rule of government and the relationship between the individual and society” (Hursh, 2007, p. 496).

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<sup>21</sup> Information found in video.

In this capacity, “the consequences for education [are] similar to those for all public goods and services,” and students are essentially reduced down to mere commodities under neoliberal policies (Hursh, 2007, p. 495). Tabb (2002) wrote that neoliberalism causes the privatization of the public provision of goods and services—moving their provision from the public sector to the private—along with deregulating how private producers can behave, giving greater scope to the single-minded pursuit of profit and showing significantly less regard for the need to limit social costs or for redistribution based on nonmarket criteria. The aim of neoliberalism is to put into question all collective structures capable of obstructing the logic of the pure market. (Tabb, 2002, p. 29)

We can see this taking place, for example, in St. Francis school district in Minnesota where the school has openly allowed businesses to come in and put up advertisements for their products and services (McNeely, 2011 para. 2). Another example can be found in Pennsbury school district in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where the Assistant Superintendent, Dr. W. David Bowman said that by allowing businesses to advertise in their schools, they are “explor[ing] ways to generate revenue and put out a message that can be motivational for students” (para 3). These are just two examples of thousands that can be found all around the country.

Some in our society say that the influx of corporations into public schools are just a way for the schools to make much needed money; while others contend that it is simply capitalism at work. I contend that the policies of neoliberalism are exchanging social democratic policies for a hope of a kind of ‘free market trade’ for all public schools. We have already begun to see this shift in public schooling when people begin to talk about having a ‘choice’ in what schools they send their children to. I do not believe that it is such a far leap to say that a free market in

public schooling could eventually lead, in the near future, to the privatization of all schools, in which case all schools would have the ultimate decision on how much they want to pay individual teachers, spend for children to attend.

The fact is that these advertisements bring to mind many questions about the effects neoliberalism is having and will be having on our public schools and on teacher's occupations within the classroom. What are these advertisements motivating students to do? Is there a reason for businesses to be involved in education at all or are the ideologies behind neoliberalism reaching into American classrooms trying to influence their stronghold over our society even further? How does this outreach of neoliberalism into our classrooms, schools, buses, and even in some reported instances, report cards, affect how society views the teachers? And if this is the case, is this just one more piece of the puzzle that goes to exemplify how teaching can never be considered one of the true professions?

With these questions in mind, we can see since the 1980's, the "context of the rise of various manifestations of global neoliberal politics, the state has been restructured with implications for teaching as a state [occupation]" (Lingard, 2009, p. 81). The idea here is that all governments like to make money; they don't like to spend it. Schooling takes a lot of money from the both the federal and individual state governments, and many times the products of the use of the money are not always favorable given the emphasis on high stakes testing results as a way to determine whether or not the products (students) of the learning environment have been successful or not.



We can examine how all government views neoliberal policies within our society further by looking at how Bourdieu (1998) views where the state<sup>22</sup> stands on matters of education. Bourdieu emphasizes educational policy production as the ‘right hand of the state;’ that is “education has been relocated within the central steering mechanisms of the Treasury and economic policy” (Bordieu, 1998; Lingard, 2009). These policy mechanisms are then linked to the introduction of quasi markets within school settings, which are equated to a human capital approach to education. This leads to a culture in school that is all about performance and testing to make sure that the states are ‘getting what they pay for.’ This is also where it becomes evident that the push for merit pay and other monetary compensation for ‘good outcomes’ is led by the right hand of the state. The idea is that better testing outcomes prove that the states are getting what they paid for, and in turn, teachers should be amply rewarded for producing ‘goods’ that show how effectively they teach (Goldstein, Macrine, & Chesky, 2011, p. 116).

On the other hand, metaphorically the left hand, according to Bourdieu (1998), we have the teachers, the spending part of the unit (p. 2). The new policy frameworks that have been set up by the mechanisms of the state have a huge impact on how teachers view themselves and the job they perform. It is believed that neoliberalism and its effects on education have “reconstituted teacher [occupations], both as a form of occupational control and as a set of traits which define the occupation” (Lingard, 2009, p. 81). The left hand, the teachers, resist the right hand, the government, in an effort to hold onto some of the improvements they have

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<sup>22</sup> From this point forward state refers to the federal government. If individual states need to be referenced, they will be preceded by the word ‘individual.’

made over the last hundred years in trying to gain status in society as being part of a true profession; such as, the use of pedagogy and theory in the classroom, autonomy, and tenure. However, these attempts are failing in the media as we will see in the section on *Teach for America* and teacher unions. The most damaging side effect neoliberalism causes for teachers in American society comes from the 'right hand' who tries to equate 'good' teaching with more potential money for teachers. Unfortunately, in a society being influenced by ideologies of neoliberalism, and where standardized testing is a standard of student achievement, society would rather see teachers awarded with more money than rewarded with the traits that have come to be representative of the true professions, such as autonomy and status.

It is evident that teaching is being pulled even further away from becoming a true profession by the fact that the neoliberalism policies that the state has implemented in an effort to have tighter control over money and outcomes in education have also tended to "thin out pedagogies and reduce the quality of education" (Lingard, 2009, p. 81). These systems that are emphasizing more control through accountability and tighter restrictions are in fact "undermin[ing] teaching as an ethical, socially just practice," and is in fact "push[ing] teachers towards the market with its promise of greater flexibility and autonomy," but are in fact not delivering on these promises (Lipman, 2009, p. 67). As Pauline Lipman (2009) writes in *Paradoxes of Teaching in Neo-Liberal times*,

In the U.S., in general, these shifts have undermined teaching as an ethical practice and teachers' agency and professionalism, particularly in the lowest performing schools which face the harshest accountability strictures and generally serve low-income students of colour. This amounts to a moral and political crisis in teaching as democratic

and humanistic purposes of education are superseded by economic goals, and one-size-fits-all standards and high stakes testing reverse equity gains of the 1960s and 1970s. (p. 68)

We have seen over “the past several decades, neoliberal policies have become so dominant that they seem to be necessary, inevitable, and unquestionable...Neoliberalism is presented as if there is no alternative” (Hursh, 2007, p. 498). This push by neoliberalism, making business more and more involved in education, whether it be advertising or other avenues, have changed what it means to be a teacher in the U.S., and this push isn’t toward the way teachers had hoped; toward making their chosen occupations more ‘professional.’ It has simply made them come under more control from more avenues than just the state. Michael Polanyi, as far back as 50 years ago, stated: “To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society” (Hursh, 2007, p. 598; Polanyi, 1954, p. 73). Could neoliberalism be the push that not only ends all hope for teachers becoming part of a true profession, but ends the public school teacher altogether?

### ***Teach for America***

One such push that is an example of neoliberalism’s impact on schools comes from a private company called *Teach for America*. The program *Teach for America* (TFA) was founded in 1990 by Wendy Kopp, a Princeton graduate who believed, like many in our society, that the American education system was hugely flawed, and at the heart of the problem lay inadequate teaching (Brewer, 2012, p. 9). TFA is a program that recruits recent college graduates from all

disciplines to go and teach in some of the poorest and most challenged schools in the nation.

TFA, according to their official website,

is building [a] movement to eliminate educational inequality by enlisting [the] nation's most promising future leaders in the effort. Our vision is that one day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education. (Teach For America, About Us, 2011, para. 3)

The corps members do not have to have any background in teaching whatsoever, as long as the person holds an accredited degree and goes through the application process, they can be selected to join the organization. Once someone is admitted to the program it is required that they attend an eight week "intensive summer institute" program so that they may "gain a solid foundation in the skills and knowledge necessary to lead students to significant achievement" (para. 8). TFA claims that candidates learn the "overarching approach utilized by successful teachers as well as specific skills such as instructional planning and classroom management (para. 8). This program is funded by the federal government and receives donations from private companies, such as, Visa, Wells Fargo, Cisco, and American Financial (Bottom of *Teach for America* Website).

Linda Darling-Hammond (1998), an educational writer, professor, and lecturer for the past thirty years, has been a huge opponent in the U.S. against neoliberal ideas in schools, most specifically against the TFA. She claims that because programs like TFA have come to fruition,

we are only going to further ‘deprofessionalize,’ or ‘deskill’<sup>23</sup> teaching. She further ascertains that because of “short-sighted licensing and hiring policies, unequal resources, and lack of attention to teacher recruitment,” by these sort of quasi teaching programs, “the most vulnerable students are continually taught by the least qualified teachers” (p. 84). Darling-Hammond further contends that “unequal access to good teaching sacrifices human potential—the opportunity each person should have to find a place to shine, to value and be valued in society” (p. 85). Simply put, educational researchers like Darling-Hammond do not believe the teachers that are trained through a means of an ‘intensive summer program’ have the necessary skills that are only learned after more time in the education field, taking classes and studying the underpinnings of theory in education. Programs like TFA only further exemplify why teaching cannot be considered a true profession.

There are many conflicting theories regarding teacher education programs and the extent that teachers need to have more training and discipline knowledge in education itself because much of society at large does not recognize teaching as a true profession. The public wonders why we should need to support further research in the field of education itself, if it is not necessarily needed to be a highly effective teacher in the schools. Much of the research we hear and see in the public in general, or even in research education itself, seems to point only toward attrition rates for TFA candidates versus that of conventional programs. TFA does its

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<sup>23</sup> When I am referring to deskilling here I am referring to what Michael Apple says are the “skills that teachers used to need, that were deemed essential to the craft of working with children—such as curriculum deliberation and planning, designing teaching and curricular strategies for specific groups and individuals based on intimate knowledge of people and education—are no longer necessary. With the large-scale influx of prepackaged material, planning is separated from execution...” (Apple, 1982, p. 255). I use this term instead of deprofessionalizing because my central claim is that teachers were never true professionals to begin with.

own research, and is very guarded about what it finds concerning how their teachers stack up to teachers that are hired that have gone through a regular teacher's education program and certification requirements.<sup>24</sup>

However, in October of 2005, Linda Darling-Hammond, Deborah J. Holtzman, Su Jin Gatlin, and Julian Vasquez Heilig, published research concerning TFA, only the second study done on TFA and its effectiveness on teacher performance and quality in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005, p. 1). The first substantial study was done by the Hoover Institution's CREDO center by Raymond, Fletcher, and Luque (2001) (p. 3). Darling-Hammond's study built on what Raymond, Fletcher, and Luque did in the Houston school system, but they took it further by examining whether TFA teachers were "differentially effective when compared to traditionally prepared and certified teachers in Houston, although [it was noted that] the researchers noted that certification status was one of the variables in their data set" (p. 4). This question is important to see how these statistics might generalize to other areas in the country where questionable comparisons are made between traditional and alternative certifications for potential teachers (p. 4). The researchers collected data in two areas, reading and math; and tested children in varying stages in first through eleventh grades. There were three types of tests given which included the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), the Stanford Achievement Test, 9<sup>th</sup> edition (SAT-9), and the Aprenda (p. 5). The Houston school district used the three different tests to try and minimize score distortions on the high

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<sup>24</sup> I must insert here that at a point in my research I emailed *Teach for America* requesting some research data concerning student achievement and statistics. However, I was politely denied information unless TFA (I did not know who I was directly writing to because there was no name attached to the email) was able to first see my research and what I was writing before the information would be sent to me. I declined, and was never answered in return.

stakes testing that were given to all the students with the TAAS, and they were also interested “in alternative measures of student achievement” (p.6). After the research was concluded they found that

although some have suggested that perhaps bright college graduates like those who join TFA may not require professional preparation for teaching, we found no instance where uncertified Teach for America teachers performed as well as standard certified teachers of comparable experience levels teaching in similar settings. In the OLS estimates, on 5 of 6 tests, uncertified TFA teachers showed a significant negative effect on student achievement gains relative to standard certified teachers. (The sixth coefficient was also negative but non-significant.) The effect sizes are noticeable: Over the course of a year, students taught by uncertified TFA teachers could be expected to achieve at levels that are, in grade equivalent terms, one-half month to 3 months lower than students taught by teachers with standard certification. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005, p. 20)

This idea that we as a society, and even traditional education training systems, such as those we find at some of the top universities, are questioning the effectiveness of traditional teaching programs and those that are trained within them, are a prime example of the “primal axiom of the neoliberal ‘justification’ of school takeovers by way of privatization” (Brewer, 2012, p. 44; Weiner, 2011). TFA finds its justification and authority among the people in our society given the rampant spread of the ideas of neoliberalism in the past 30 years (Brewer, 2012; Weiner, 2011). It is no wonder that TFA has had much support from society at large since its inception. It is infused with the same ideals that are being pushed upon the public as the cure all to the U.S. society’s problems, which includes educational issues.

TFA is built on a business concept whereas, highly competitive people are recruited, placed in classrooms, and are given the material they are going to teach and in the order they will teach it, a pre-made curriculum of sorts, with very few choices the teacher makes in the classroom by his/herself. This business concept of 'one size fits all problem students' has crept from our private sector into our nation's schools in the form of TFA, and as a consequence of this type of 'deskilling' of the teaching field we find that the U.S. society at large does not view teaching as a *truly* professional field. The idea is that training, theoretical knowledge, and research, are not needed to be a teacher.

*'Hey, I can go through eight weeks of training and become a teacher, why should he/she make more than me or think they are better than me just because they went through regular training...We know the same stuff, right?'*

## **The Role of Teacher Unions as seen in American Society**

The role of teacher unions in American society is designed by their "confrontation to the dominant research agenda for educational reform," which is a response to the model of privatization or neoliberal policies in the U.S. that dictate to the public that there is a definite crisis in the American classroom (Torres et al., 2000, p. 2). This crisis in the American classroom has come under scrutiny by the society at large and much of the focus has been on the teacher unions and their exact purpose in the place of education. Many people in our society see unions in education as a contradiction to what teachers claim their sole reason for teaching is—the children.

There is a contradiction being played out in American society between what teachers are claiming they are a part of, a true profession, and what unionization means in American



society at large. Teachers claim to be true professionals; however, unions in U.S. society are typically organized blue collared workers who have grouped together to allow them to gain some power or leverage over their employers. True professions, such as can be found in medicine and law, do not have union's, they have member organizations that have self-regulating bodies that dictate the ethical boundaries of the profession to the professionals within them. One must be a member of their respective associations to practice the given profession. To become a doctor one must be a member of the American Medical Association, to become a lawyer one must be a member of the Bar Association, or to be part of the clergy one has to belong to the respective church. Of course, one of the main differences between the true professionals associations and the teacher's unions is that teachers are most of the time not forced to be a part of a teacher's union to practice in the field of education. They can turn down teaching positions that require one to join a union if they want to keep looking for employment; nonetheless, it is a choice every teacher has.

Although there are various teacher unions that can be found across the U.S., the two largest and most influential unions are the *National Education Association* (NEA) and the *American Federation of Teachers* (AFT). The NEA was formed in 1857 when 10 individual state educator associations put out "the call" to unite in an attempt to gain a broader and louder voice in the U.S. educational system ("NEA History," 2001-2012 para. 8). In 1857, the NEA was known as the National Teachers Association and membership was restricted to only "gentlemen;" this did included minority male educators (para. 8). It would take nine more years to allow women to become full members of the union. They officially became the NEA in 1870, and today are the largest teacher union with over 3.2 million members on their rosters. They

claim to fight for equality for teachers through bargaining for better wages, better working conditions, and more support from local, state, and federal government (Side bar on NEA website).

Conversely, the American Federation of Teachers was founded much later in 1916 (American Federation of Teachers, 2011 para. 1). Since the AFT came into being much later than the NEA, they have always allowed full enrollment of all who wanted to join. The mission of the AFT is to essentially strengthen the teachers place in the teaching field through collaboration, support, and economic stability all the while promoting democracy and human rights (Side bar on AFT website). The AFT is now comprised of more than 1.5 million members throughout the U.S.

These two unions are what comprise some of the most powerful voices in education in the U.S. They play a central role in collectively bargaining for the

way schools work; decision-making process; hiring, evaluation, and firing criteria, including grievance procedure; resource allocation (pay, benefits, promotion, increases, and supplements); teaching methods; career ladders and on-the-job training programs; and getting educational goals and standards and ways to evaluate them. (Torres et al., 2000, p. 9)

Most notably, teacher unions throughout their histories have helped to shape the “political discourse” on issues concerning education in the U.S. (p. 9). Essentially, they were created to help teachers in the workplace, so that teachers could concentrate on what is important, the students.

Throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, teacher unions were concerned with “improving employment rights and wages and working conditions, and on pressuring the government to increase educational budgets” of which they were highly effective up until the late 1970’s (Torres et al., 2000, p. 10). By the early 1980’s, the U.S. government started tightening its control over what they considered inflammatory public spending, of which public education fell victim. Collective bargaining was also put under scrutiny, as were conditions of teachers pay and benefits. Not coincidentally, much of these restrictive measures were on the heels of the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, which only went to further highlight the seemingly ineffective way teachers were instructing the American students. Unions went on the defensive trying to salvage what gains they had made during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century toward any type of teacher ‘professionalization’ (Torres et al., 2000, p. 11).

Teacher unions have always been situated politically and have had some influence over state and federal policy making; however, since the 1980’s and the pressure from what was perceived as the failing of the American public education system, unions opinions have lost a good portion of their influence in the political realm, and what is left falls under suspicion by the government (Torres et al., 2000, p. 11). The government during the 1980’s and continuing on into the twenty first century, has followed

discourse on education [that focuses] on concepts such as restructuring, excellence, decentralization, managerialism, and accountability. Moreover, in order to increase control over unions, governments now use the very concepts of responsibility, service, expertise, and autonomy that were advanced by unions in the past to increase their power and prestige. (p. 11)

All of this was done in effect by the state to halt any steps to further 'professionalize' the field of teaching because the government wanted to essentially control everything about public education, including the teachers, without paying higher wages. The perfect way to do this was to vilify the teacher unions, and show the nation that teacher unions proved that teachers themselves were not true professionals, but ordinary public or private sector workers. As an example of this type of vilification of teachers we only have to look to the conservative, right-wing media figures. In July of 2009, a "speech by Bob Chanin, former general counsel of the National Education Association," was cropped by the media to suggest that "Chanin admitted that the union does not "care about the children," when in fact, a "transcript of Chanin's remarks show that this [was] a blatant distortion" (Media Matters for America, 2011 para. 1).

Another push against teacher unions in the U.S. that has been taking place since the 1980's, this involves processes that are greatly influencing other facets of our education system as well, such as those previously mentioned in programs like TFA; these nudging's are produced within a dominant neoliberal ideology of marketization that celebrates privatization of the education space. This new marketization of schools done through the state's approval, calls for more accountability, effectiveness, and competence "via privatization or public sector reform and in the process has sent" the unions scrambling trying to find a means for teachers and themselves to maintain some control over education (Torres et al., 2000, p. 21). This is where some of the beginnings of the idea of a 'special' type of 'professionalization' in teaching began to occur. When the businesses and government started coming into the schools and dictating to education specialists and teachers what they were doing wrong and what they should be doing in the classroom, we see a push by teachers to make the public see them as

'professionals' in the traditional sense. Teacher unions have been the driving force behind this effort, and as we will see in the next paragraph, much resentment in society at large concerning educational issues has landed squarely on the unions themselves.

The U.S. government, especially the right-wing segment, has done their job very well in the vilification of the teacher unions. Recently, in the U.S., there has been a "tremendous amount of negative publicity" and the public at large has come to view teacher unions as detrimental to the field of education and student success (Wright & Gundersen, 2004).

According to the 2011 Gallop Poll, as many as 47% of Americans believe that unionization in the field of teaching is detrimental to the education of American students (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011, p. 13).

By no means are teacher's union's perfect manifestations in the progress for educational reform. There are times when teacher unions seem to be impeding educational progress and what some would call teacher 'professionalization.' For instance, in many public schools teacher union contracts have made it very difficult to fire incompetent teachers, while in other contracts it is almost impossible to reward superior teachers for jobs performed well above standard academic achievement requirements (Torres et al., 2000, p. 39). Teacher unions "consider themselves the last line of defense of public education and pursuing a general interest in democratic societies rather than acting on behalf of their [individual] membership" (p. 39). Teacher unions provide a united voice for teachers and the teaching field, although in many of these above mentioned instances where teacher unions may not have made the wisest bargaining decisions, politicians and the media are quick to point out the flaws of the organization. For example, we have former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in 2000,

singling out unions as being the sole reason why children were being held back; and during President Georg W. Bush's time in office we can find him on record stating that unions were the direct reason why educational reform never got pushed through (Wright & Gundersen, 2004, p. 4). This firestorm by the politicians of unions and then the pick-up of the news in bits by the mass media toward unions have only gone to further vilify teachers and remove them even further away from being seen as a true profession.

To understand the vilification process that is taking place against teacher unions in the U.S., one only need turn on the national news, go online, or open a newspaper. The quote by Rush Limbaugh about teacher's being political bullies at the beginning of this chapter, seems to be typical of the firestorm that surrounds teachers and their involvement in unions over the last several years, especially in 2011, when many states throughout the U.S. were trying to make it illegal for teacher unions and other jobs considered 'public sector' positions to be able to collectively bargain (Limbaugh, 2011 para. 4). An example of anti-union, anti-bargaining movement started in Wisconsin when the governor of the state wanted to make collective bargaining illegal for public sector workers, including teachers, firefighters, and the police. The unions across Wisconsin, including the NEA and AFT quickly organized and marched on their state capital. After much deliberation by their representatives, including a walk out by the democrats in the Wisconsin state senate, sit-ins by teachers, unions, and individual citizens, the bill to end collective bargaining rights was still passed and put into law. In Wisconsin since the passing of the new laws, there has been a movement to recall the governor and several senators that voted the bill through originally, as well as to repeal the law altogether.

Nonetheless, the actions of Wisconsin started a huge controversy throughout the U.S. about the rights of workers, and many states around the country would soon follow.

It was made very clear to the public through the actions of the various states that teacher unions were part of the problem of education, and that because teachers belonged to a union, they were in fact not true professionals in any sense of the term, and needed to be 'put in their place' just like all other workers in the state. We can see shortly after the incident with the teacher's unions in Wisconsin that Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam also made a move to end the collective bargaining rights for teachers in the state of Tennessee as well. Bill Haslam states: "I want to be very clear: my goal is to treat teaching like the important and honorable position that it is" (Haslam, 2011). There is nothing in his state of the state address in 2011 stating that teachers are 'professionals' in any sense of the term. He refers to teaching as a 'position,' and in another part he refers to teachers as 'servants of the state.' He would go on to essentially say that teacher unions were an impediment to educational progress in the state of Tennessee, and that the state should follow Wisconsin's lead and ban collective bargaining too. Another example can be found with Chris Christie, Governor of New Jersey, who commented on how the teachers and the unions they are a part of were acting irrationally concerning collective bargaining rights around the country. He states in an ABC interview with Diane Sawyer: "I believe the teachers in New Jersey in the main are wonderful public servants that care deeply. But their union, their union are a group of political thugs;" he goes on to say that "in any other 'profession' you get judged everyday—not going to keep your job if not deemed competent" (Sawyer, 2011). These politicians are confirming, by way of their words to the American public at large, that teaching is not and has never been relegated to the status of a

true profession, and that the public should see teachers as ‘workers’ and ‘servants,’ and the unions that they belong to as ‘political thugs.’

Albeit a popular idea to try and vilify teachers through their involvement in teacher unions, there is research that has been conducted that shows that schools that are in covered states, meaning where all teachers are members of a union that have collective bargaining rights and actively use them in the schools that they cover, show a vast improvement in student achievement and outcomes (Wright & Gundersen, 2004, p. 5). A comprehensive study was conducted by Steelman, Powell, and Carini (2001) in the *Harvard Educational Review* that found a “statistically significant and positive relationship between State teacher unionization rates and State standardized test scores” (p. 6). They found these schools more likely to have a “lower student-teacher ratio, higher per capita expenditures, higher teacher salaries, better working conditions, better teacher training, and greater worker autonomy” (6). There are some studies that show contradictory evaluations to the above mentioned, but the results from many cross-sectional studies have shown strong proof that teacher unions foster a more ‘professional’ atmosphere for the teacher, and as a result, end up with better student achievement outcomes.

If the government is creating an environment for teaching that is counterproductive to the needs and desires of teachers in the schools in which they teach, it is just a matter of time before the impacts of the prevailing attitudes and the public perception will be irrefutably harmful to those they were sworn to serve, the students. If governments are “restricting teacher interests and the right to collective bargaining based on cost-cutting efficiencies for consumers, teachers may be unable to marshal public sentiment,” and without the support of



teacher unions, teachers “can and will be paid less for what they do,” and “their working conditions can and will deteriorate” (Torres et al., 2000, p. 20). How much harder will it be for teachers to claim any sort of resemblance of ‘professional’ status when teacher unions no longer have the right to collectively bargain or even exist in the U.S.? Teachers are not able to claim true professional status because they are not living in a country that allows them to do so. What little justification there has been for ‘professional’ status for the teaching field has been done through the teacher unions, and those are sadly being relegated into non-existence by politicians with the assistance of the mass media.

## **American Society's View in Conclusion**

Teaching and teachers at large are viewed much of the time through the lens of what the mass media wants us to see. This is how ideology is disseminated. Unfortunately, what they want us to see is not always the most favorable aspects of the teaching field, such as low test scores, underperforming schools, degenerative working conditions, inflexible teacher unions, incompetent teachers, and money hungry, career climbing 'political thugs' (Goldstein et al., 2011, p. 113). These types of images and stories in the media only go to further demonstrate to the American public that teachers are far from the true professionals they claim to be. The reality, as most teachers are quite aware of, is far from these disparaging flash pictures of all the ills of our education system.

Furthermore, American society's understanding of who teachers really are and what they do for this nation has been sadly compromised by the political and economic policies that have been put into place at the state and federal levels, in particular since the 1980's. These systems that reinforce the neoliberal ideals in our school that drive the further marketization and privatization of our schools, are some of the worst offenders of the push away from any type of 'professionalization' in the teaching field. In fact, these sorts of neoliberal ideas when implemented in schools only go to further deskill the teaching field. Is it wrong to imagine a time in the near future where all one needs to be able to teach is a folder that has a script in it for the teacher to read?

It is not unimaginable, in fact, TFA and programs like it, are largely heading in that direction, claiming that they are the saving grace for under-performing, inner city schools and that their 'scripted' way is better than traditional teacher training. But the hype in the general

public concerning TFA and its members and what they can accomplish in schools that have needs that far outweigh what they are receiving, should be admired if for nothing else than to say; “Look we can change public perspective on matters of education.” They have been able to change the perception of how people see teaching; the public doesn’t see these teachers as any more ‘professional’ than other teachers, but they have been able to change how the public perceives needed change in the teaching field, and because of this the public has come to have respect for TFA and its members because as the media reports on TFA—at least they are trying to make changes. They have been able to make these perceptive changes in the mass media, even when educational experts have openly been hostile in their criticisms toward them. Teachers and those who are involved in the education and training of teachers want to distinguish themselves as part of a true profession. They want society to know that there is theory behind what they do in the classroom; and that they are different then the TFA members who spend eight weeks in preparation for teaching for the next two years. How can anyone claim to be part of a true profession if it only takes eight weeks to learn all you need to practice and teach in the field itself?

The American public takes very little of anything founded in extensive educational research into account. For that matter, most of the general public will never see educational research (Miller, 1999, p. A17). They know what they know because they saw it on television, read it in a newspaper, were told by a neighbor, scrolled through it on a website, or experienced it for themselves. When someone asks if they would like their son or daughter to choose teaching as their chosen career path, just like in the beginning venue, the answer to the question is going to be for at least a third of the time, no, and it is due in large part to how

teachers are shown in the media, and the resulting affects in the public's perception at large (Bushaw & Lopez, 2011, p. 11). This perception, given by the devises of neoliberalism ideals in our schools, the programs that it fosters, and the dogging of teacher unions in American society are just another way to further exemplify the rational that teaching is most assuredly not a true profession.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

***All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them ~ Galileo***

### **In Conclusion**

As we have discussed, teachers and those that write regarding educational issues write about how much teachers are appreciated, respected, and *should* be seen as ‘professionals.’ Many educationalists, including most<sup>25</sup> teachers, will not openly admit that public school teachers are not classified as true professionals. There is an endless barrage of literature, books, classes, conferences, and seminars for not only teachers, but anyone who will listen to the cry to “professionalize” teaching. All this is in an effort to try to convince society and those in charge that teachers and the job of teaching does indeed deserve to be recognized as one of the true professions. This ideology of professionalism “has led many teachers and others to see improvement of teachers’ status in terms of the expert professions, which continue to enjoy power and prestige (although they seem to be eroding)” (Pratte & Rury, 1991, p. 70).

Furthermore, it is quite clear from the history of teaching and the sociological ideology of the traditional professions that neither the field of education nor the teachers within it will be ranked as a professional class of workers. It is also evident that society in general does not view teachers with the kind of respect that someone in one of the true professions is afforded;

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<sup>25</sup> I use the word ‘most’ here because I would have included myself in this category until I really became involved in furthering my knowledge of the education field through more class work and research. Teachers, as I know many different types of teachers, in a barrage of varying degrees, grade levels, and disciplines, do not like to admit that they are not treated as professionals. I use the word ‘most’ as an ambiguous reference to the teaching field as a whole.

we simply do not trust our teachers with that kind of privilege or responsibility, even though many of them have the education, experience, and knowledge base that doctors, lawyers, and members of the clergy have (Thayer-Bacon & Ellison, 2011)<sup>26</sup>.

In addition to the various components that go against a professionalized idea of teaching, we must ask ourselves a few questions, such as: will professionalizing the field of teaching solve the problems that seemingly plague the American education system?; will the American public be willing to invest the time and monetary expenses necessary to establish teachers as true professionals?; and could this endeavor be a feasible avenue, one in which members of the American society across the board will come to accept and respect?

With these questions in mind, and with all the information and material being passed around about: 'How to be a professional,' 'How to be more professional,' 'How to act more professional,' 'How to change teacher professionalism,' and 'How to further professionalism in the classroom and school;' it is no wonder that teachers view themselves as part of a true profession. However, there is one thing lacking from all the books, manuals, classes, and seminars that are geared toward teachers—the simple truth.

The world that a teacher must be a part of and the culture they must encompass themselves in every day, the history of teachers, our society in general, the rules and regulations of our government and states, the schools and systems for which they work, the administrators and principals they work under, the students they teach, and their own

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<sup>26</sup> The concept of not trusting our teachers comes from the ideas written in Thayer-Bacon's and Ellison's paper, "Learning to trust our teachers."

classroom spaces, all lead to the inevitable truth that teachers are captives of a system that does not allow them to be part of a true profession, nor will they ever be allowed to be because of the fundamental dynamics of the job. Simply put, public school teachers are told what to do, when to do it, and how it is to be done; they must “adhere to predetermined practices and follow endless rules and regulations, even against their judgment” (Ambrosie & Haley, 1988, p. 88). Teachers and students alike in this effect are treated much like “passive uniform cogs in a production process” (p. 88).

We see evidence of this production style form of teaching through programs discussed like *Teach for America*. These teacher-training-replacement programs espouse that teachers are educational ‘professionals,’ but they are not treated in such a manner. Taking recent college graduates and training them for eight weeks how to be a teacher, doesn’t constitute a ‘professional’ status by any means, it only perpetuates the widely held mentality in American society that ‘anyone can teach.’ Not helping the matters any is that the people administering the teacher training in these programs do not have to be teachers themselves, much less, experts in education. The TFA clearly states on their official website that “corps members don’t have to have studied education prior to applying to the corps,” they only have to receive a “teaching credential before they’re hired by a school and they must be considered 'highly qualified' according to state-specific requirements” (Teach For America, Why Teach for America?, 2011 para. 1). This is also true of their support and training staff, who don’t ever have to qualify for teaching credentials since they are not working for a school district at all. Further, any resemblance of ‘professional’ autonomy goes out the window when these organizations dictate to their workers exactly what must be taught and how to teach it, under

the guise of knowing what is best when it comes to helping students with hardships to achieve more.

These 'quick fix' teacher programs are part of the widening of the values of neoliberalism that engulf our U.S. society through the means of privatization in education. Neoliberalism in American society is all about the results of what is being undertaken; very much a business type model. The ideas that 'time equates to money,' and that 'you should get what you pay for,' are the prevailing attitudes that surround the neoliberal ideology in American society. With this in mind, education cannot guarantee an end product that is considered to be worth the money put into it, nor can education produce an avenue to extract profit from; thus leading to the inevitable lack of interest and investment back into the education field itself. In other words, teachers cannot make a profit necessarily by performing their job duties or guarantee to the 'stakeholders,' who are the local, state, and federal governments respectively, that the students will be able to become productive members of our society. According to the neoliberal stance in the U.S., the question becomes: Why should anybody want to invest in our education system when there is really no monetary gain to be made? What then becomes the purpose for children to become educated?

Teaching is not like being a doctor, lawyer, or part of the clergy. A cardio-thoracic surgeon can perform open heart surgery every day for the rest of their career and be able to make a substantial profit every time. A lawyer can take on cases, some of which may be multi-million dollar lawsuits, and they can earn a profit every day for the duration of the time they are practicing law. Someone in the clergy, although they may not make as much as a doctor or a lawyer, can go where their services are needed, become part of the church, and their personal



needs will be taken care of for the rest of their lives. But a teacher can only show people what to do and how to do it. It is true that students can come back and show what a particular school or teacher has done for them to be able to get what they have in life, to show how they have profited society from the actions of the teachers that instructed them; nonetheless, it will not make the teacher any closer to getting the same 'professional' status that people in a true profession are awarded. This is the nature of the beast and the epitome of the education field and being a teacher within it. Essentially the "outcomes of successful schooling cannot be measured within a short period of time," and the "accountability to each teacher [is] difficult due to the number of teachers involved and [a] variety of other factors in [a child's] education" (Shon, 2006, p. 10). In such a capacity, teachers are rewarded with something referred to as intrinsic rewards. This is the satisfaction teachers are awarded with when they have performed their job well, a feeling of accomplishment, pride, and the knowledge of having a job well done, but it makes them no more part of a true profession. As a matter of fact, students can come back and blame their lack of mobility and profit making ability on their school and their teachers, but it will not necessarily change the teacher's status within the system.

So what else does the 'system' do to try to 'professionalize' the field of teaching? There have been many movements over the last thirty years that have been placed upon teachers including: more accountability measures, more standards, more education, more testing requirements, and more evaluations, among others. There is one thing in common with all these elements in the push for the 'professionalization' of teaching and that is the idea of 'more.' In an effort to 'improve' education the federal and state governments make teachers go into debt, via college degrees and certifications, to acquire all the 'knowledge' that they feel is

necessary to teach children. But, is this knowledge what teachers really need or are they requiring these extensive programs just to prove that the teachers have 'more' invested into their impending jobs so that certainly that must mean that they are prepared to give 'more' to the students they will be teaching?

The 'more' aspect that is being pushed in education is sadly lacking in some very critical areas where teaching is concerned. When it comes right down to it, the things that teachers really need are lacking in programs across the board, like the foundations for education—how to really teach what the children need, how to manage a classroom 180 days a year, the foundations of our education system and how they work, and what education should really be about. Many critics argue that teachers receive the foundations for teaching in the seminars and programs that the school system provides in their daily work environment. I think this is a misguided way to approach what is being done on the job for teacher training. There is no doubt that there are some really great schools that have strong supportive systems that allow and pay for the furthering of teachers' educations (Torres et al., 2000). However, on the whole, foundations of education programs across the board have been slashed and eliminated from universities. When a person can go and teach right out of college with no educational foundation or methods classes and without acquiring a teaching degree, or furthermore, when a student can attend a university for two semesters of student teaching and a summer of classes and receive a master's in education, there is a problem with trying to convince society that teachers are in fact part of a true profession. Would you trust taking your child to a pediatrician that only had one year of training right out of college? Would you call that person a professional? We can throw more tests, more classes, higher test scores, more schooling, more

regulations and rules at teachers, but it does not matter; it will not make teaching or those that teach part of the true professions or for that matter, change the status of teachers in American society.

Further, it can be argued, again, that being part of a traditional profession can be disadvantaging to those who teachers are there to serve—the students. One of the main criticisms of the professionalization of various fields is that there is the “negative consequences of the power and privilege of professionalization” (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008, p. 116). Identifying teaching as a part of a true profession could be argued to have “consequences that undermine the ends of democracy, equity, and cultural diversity” (N. C. Burbules & K. Densmore, 1991, p. 151). We cannot pick and choose what aspects of being part of a true profession we want to use, such as making a better income or the ability to choose who we have in our classrooms, although we have seen that at times the teacher unions have tried to accomplish this, but to the detriment of how teachers and their unions are seen in the public at large. True professionals must always have all of the aspects of being a true profession. Some like Burbules and Densmore (1991), argue that emphasizing the need for teacher’s to be part of a professional cast would be to the detriment of the field, and “adopting policies whose purpose is to set teachers above and apart from those they serve,” would in fact, be possibly one of the worst desires for the teaching field and the teachers involved (p. 156). In order to become true professionals, teachers would have to be given higher pay, the ability to decide their own curriculums, hire their colleagues to evaluate them for tenure, pick their own clients, have the ability to kick out students that are not performing to the highest standards, and be able to determine how much to charge for their educational services. Education would no longer be

available to the common masses. Yeah, teachers would have higher pay and better benefits, but only by returning back to a medieval view of education in which only the upper class had any formal education. We have to consider the consequences, both positive and negative, when considering further pushing by teachers for professionalization. Even though I do not believe that teachers will ever acquire the ability to have their chosen field become a true profession, something must change.

Finally, I think it is important to understand that even if the field of teaching did become part of the class of true professions, would it necessarily make anything for teachers better? Would it improve student learning or outcomes? Would it be beneficial for the teachers themselves? Who would it help? Who would it hurt, and in what ways? What would be the difference between what teachers have to do now and what they would have to do if there was a consensus that teachers are definitely part of the true professions now? Being part of the elite professions would certainly improve teacher status in our society, give them better wages, and would stimulate some of the brightest in our society to want to go into teaching, but we have to weigh this against other options that might be more suitable for the field of teaching. Even though I do not believe that teachers will ever acquire the ability to have their chosen field become a true profession, something must change.

### **What Should Be . . .?**

Instead of wasting energy on pretending that we, as teachers, are in fact part of a true profession, we need to focus our attention and energy on creating what we can control. Like Burbules and Densmore (1991) contend, the preoccupation with teaching becoming a true

profession is quite “tenacious and seductive;” it occupies a lot of energy for a lot of people that could be used for more productive goals (p. 156). It is understandable that there is a frustration with the current status of teaching and teachers in American society. I agree with Burbules and Densmore (1991) when they state that ‘we,’ meaning American society in general, need to agree that we need to

improve the authority and respect accorded teachers, attract the best possible people into teaching, prepare them better, support and reward them so they will stay in teaching, and give them the latitude to do their jobs without undue interference. (p. 56)

There is no doubt that teachers need better pay, better benefits, better working conditions, more latitude within the curriculum, more say in regulations and rules that are imposed upon educational standards, and more push to keep ‘good’ teachers in teaching in so many places. But undue emphasis on creating a false sense of professionalism is not the way to achieve these needs and desires.

There is a dichotomy to teaching that no other job has. Arguably, there is no other ‘work’ on this planet that does exactly what a teacher is required to do. The list of all the requirements of teachers on a daily basis is long and arduous, and most of the time that list of daunting work doesn’t include the work they do with the students, because to ‘good’ teachers, the students are not the work, they are the best part of their day. Everything else is what gets in the way. Teachers need to stop focusing so much attention and time on matters of status and approval from the public at large because retribution will never happen if that is what is waited upon. I believe it is the responsibility of the teacher and those involved with the education system to let the iron clad grip go on the hope that we will ever assume a place

among the true professions. I believe the dynamics of the world are changing rapidly, and at some point we may in fact not even have such jobs as true professions.

However, for now, one thing we can control is the de-skilling and shortcuts of teacher training and preparation. As teachers, we need to make it clear that we must not allow programs that short-change genuine teacher training programs for two week crash courses on how to manage unruly children. If teachers are allowed to be de-skilled, they start to lose autonomy; if teachers lose their autonomy, the students will be the ones who suffer. De-skilled teachers “can neither find for themselves nor provide for their students the intellectual challenge which is the core of life-long learning” (Runte, 1995 p. 40).

What can teachers do to help stop de-skilling the teaching field? They can start by contacting public officials and their government representatives to try to get laws enacted that benefit themselves and their student’s futures. We can no longer passively sit by the way side and let ‘others’ decide how we are going to prepare our future for our students. In the classroom, teachers can make sure that they are using the skills they learned in their university preparation; such as being reflective about the world around them, and bringing the outside world into the classroom, which helps bring relevancy to what they are trying to accomplish every day. Furthermore, teachers can and should have a sense of respect for themselves and the work they do, and take pride in the job they are doing by setting high standards for themselves and their students, but they should not confuse this sort of dignity in what they do for a sense of being part of a true profession.

We can control how much effort we put into making changes in the world around us, in our classrooms, and in the field of education. The only futile endeavor is one that was never begun in the first place.

## **What I Have to Say at the End of My Research**

I came into my research for this endeavor with the idea that I needed to come up with a new category for teachers because there was nothing that described them adequately. They are not professionals, and they're not blue collar workers, such as plumbers, electricians, and carpenters. I do not believe that teachers are craftspeople or artists, unlike many of the authors whom I read for my research, such as Richard Pratte and John Rury (1991). There are certain fundamental ideas surrounding the notions of the crafts that I do not agree with. Teachers are not 'professionals' in the new sense of the term many like to use in today's society; like saying a fast food worker is a restaurant 'professional.' They are not even service people like many want to categorize them as, such as fire fighters and police men. I think at the end of my research and deep thought about this topic that I have come to the rather sobering realization that teachers are having such a troubling time in our society, in the media, and in their places of employment because they have no place, no category, no one and no sense of unifying ideology to fall back on; teaching and teachers across the board, from one location to another, are different. Because of these differences, and the lack of a unifying body of knowledge and background, they are at the whims of every wind that passes by. Every government official who wants new rules and regulations enacted; every politician that wants his/her agenda passed; every citizen who feels they are entitled to something that others should not be; every school

board member that might be bought by big business or the like; and every student who doesn't want to sit in a classroom anymore. Teachers are at the beck and call of every single entity in our society; they are pushed and pulled by every whim, including those that come from boards, regulations, rules, laws, and research. However, for every voice that comes to knock them down through that wind, they stand back up and face it head on, and even if there is collaboration and support within a given school community, they must face every challenge by themselves. Some would indeed say that teachers across the nation have entities that back them up—the unions. In fact, in some places teachers have unions that may be able to help; in other locations the unions are powerless to do anything because of government interference and the taking away of collective bargaining and striking rights. There are new laws being put into place every day across the U.S. that seek to ban and strip the rights of the teacher's unions. Whether or not one believes that unions are good or bad for teachers in America, they are nonetheless the only unifying body that teachers have. There is no one else for the teacher to turn to, no classification of people that can stand by their sides to tell others to stop and listen to the needs of the teachers. The teachers are the experts, the knowledge workers, but where does that get them if they cannot have a voice, a way to communicate their needs and their expertise in our society without being shunned or silenced (Runte, 1995 p. 41)?

In writing this paper, I came to realize that I cannot put a label on a category for them.

John Dewey wrote

Such a sense of the real thing is retrospective rather than prospective; it implicitly takes the messiness of actual teaching to be the margin of error in striving to fit a pattern, rather than the sign of freshness and uniqueness in a struggle to make the future. So



bright ideas come and bright ideas go, and teachers lose track of their own [ep all] in margins of error. (Dewey, 1938; McDonald, 1992, pp. 2-3)

I think that my unwillingness to label or categorize teachers is not a shortcoming, but as Dewey writes it is prospective. I know that teachers are not professionals and will never be allowed to be such; but neither should teachers be left on their own, hopelessly dangling among the winds of discontent, never allowed to speak their mind or desires for the betterment of our children and our society. In many places, teachers have very little if any autonomy, are being more and more de-skilled, and are not allowed to voice their opinions or concerns on any matters facing our education system; but this must change.

My concern for this matter is important to me, not because I am a teacher necessarily, but because I have two children of my own. I want their teachers to feel the satisfaction of accomplishment, and be amply rewarded for what they do for my children and the others that are entrusted in their care. My future and my children's future are in the hands of these people, maybe they should be called "Future Holders." That is exactly what they are and what they have to endeavor for every day they are in the classroom. To me, teachers, and the education field, are more important than any other career, job, craft, art, love, or true profession; they are what create all other categories in our world. So maybe "Future Holders" is befitting. Teachers hold the keys to the future of our society and our way of life by ensuring that our children are given the knowledge needed to be productive, 'happy' members of our society. Every classification has to start somewhere. New rules and requirements have to be established. Any teachers want to help start?

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